AarinSecret

2015 Issue #5

Cover Artist
Minoru
JoeLing

Featured Interview
Nekota Yonezou
Baozi & Hana
DDTenka & Pinky
Sakuya & Stayxxxx

Fan's Talk
Takarai Rihito
Shimazaki Nobunaga
Manga reviews
Fan's Spotlight

Preview of Aarin's original characters!

A BL day trip in Japan
Our BL filled day in Japan including a visit to Libre Publishing!

Get to know more about
PenguinFrontier

SPECIAL
BL Guide for Beginners

Book: *"Samezeu" (published by Libre Publishing)*
Cat: *Smartphone accessory (from Shibuya 109)*
Pen: *Wacom pen (I ran out of ideas for a space filler)*
Phone wallpaper: *Rynisyou.tumblr.com*

Aarin's Message

Welcome to the 2015 issue where we took a look back at some yaoi basics. In recent years, it seems like "BL" has become a more popular choice of word compared to "Yaoi", perhaps due to its simplicity and less obviousness in public spaces.

This whole year has been a very rewarding one for me and I've even expanded my media team to include more people, especially to make this magazine possible. We were given great opportunities to attend many amazing events, meet some amazing artists, connect with fellow fans, and even interview some people that mean a lot in this industry. Words can't describe how thankful I am to have had the chance to meet popular BL manga artist Nekota Yonezou and Libre Publishing's editor/producer at the Anicult convention in Indonesia. In a surprising twist of events, we were exclusively invited to visit Libre's office in Japan, a huge thing for us as fans of the genre! With that, we've compiled a personal "BL Day" in Japan and explored the many wonders of yaoi-related things in Japan to share with you.

Other than that, we were fortunate enough to get the chance to talk to every fans' favourite cosplay couple, Baozi and Hana, as well as quite a few popular cosplayers who are also BL fans, such as DDTenka, Pinky, King, Stayxxxx, and Sakuya. We touched on more BL-related information rather than just about their cosplay in general, so I hope that you'll learn something new about them through our article, especially from the way they responded to our questions (they seemed to be more hyper than usual!) I guess it could be because they don't get interviewed about BL every time during events.

This year also brought with it the hugely popular Touken Ranbu, though not a BL game, but so overloaded with pretty boys that many fujoshis swoon over it all the same. That's a reason why you'll be seeing a lot of Touken Ranbu-related stuff in this issue. Also, Takarai Rihito's Ten Count has been receiving a lot of love from fans too so I'll be sharing some of what I've read about the manga artist.

To top it off, we have some wonderful articles sent in by fans such as reviews, experiences, and some information about themselves. Something light-hearted and fun to wrap up the magazine.

I hope this edition will inspire you or anyone who likes BL to do something that you may have doubts or reservations about, such as taking a trip to Japan to see all things BL (it's not as scary as some people think!). If you're a BL artist and gets discouraged easily by people who judge you, do know that you're not alone and that there'll always be someone who appreciates what you do. If you're a cosplayer or a fan of cosplayers, I hope the featured cosplayers in this issue will help you understand them better and perhaps, even keep you motivated to pursue or take an interest in cosplay. And I hope that by the end of this magazine, you'll be encouraged to pick up a yaoi title by purchasing an original copy. It helps greatly and speeds up the overall translation process through licensing, which means more accessible yaoi and BL for us all!

Enjoy the issue!

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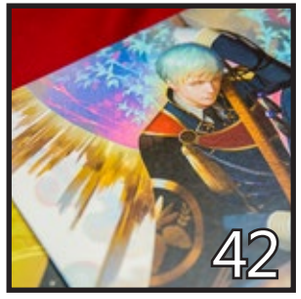

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Why are we doing this for free (non-profit)? Because we want to spread the BL love!

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Note: All photographs are by HJ Kori except for Shimazaki Nobunaga article, Fan's Spotlight or unless stated otherwise.

Minoru JoeLing

Cover Artist

Ten Count Fanart Keychain

Hi minna-san! Minoru JoeLing here. Am currently living in the land of the Merlion, Singapore! I can speak Chinese and English and a little bit of Japanese. I have a normal full-time job, which is a secret I simply cannot reveal.

My art style is forever changing, depending on my mood and emotions at the time, so I don't have a definitive drawing style. I started out by drawing shojo illustrations at first, but have been drawing since my primary school days (aka a little kid doodling around while the teacher's not looking. Shhh….another secret). Slowly but steadily, I came across the BL field, and have not looked back! When it comes to painting tools I like, I'm currently using and loving Paint Tool Sai and Photoshop. They work very well with my art style.

I can't really pinpoint the time when I came across the BL field, but what I do remember is watching Gravitation and Loveless, my first BL animes! When I'm not working, I love reading mangas and watching lots of animes and movies, so much so I don't really have favourites, there are too many good ones. But at the moment, my game of choice is the great Touken Ranbu! I love so many characters from the animes and mangas I read that I can't even tell you my favourite pairings. I ship TOO MANY of them! Even in real life! (fangirl stalker mode: ON!)

Minoru's Sketches

Minoru's Doujins

Doujins are something I'm passionate about. (Psst…some of my fave pairings are in them) Some of the ones I'm proud of are the Free! Eternal Summer: Sousuke x Rin : Dog Sousuke and Touken Ranbu R18 Doujin : Uniform : Tsurumaru x Ichigo doujins! When it comes to my drawings, I am pretty methodical in nature. And so, I like starting with the face, and only then, the body. And besides, it's usually the face that attracts us to a character first right? Unless the character is topless, but let's save that for another time.

When it comes to the type of BL I like, again, I don't have a preference as to light or hardcore. Why you ask? Because I love BOTH of them! Isn't variety supposed to be the spice of life? Light BLs come with very good storylines. And I think it's safe to say that a majority of Fujoshi will not say no to Hardcore BL? (Evil Laugh)

I'm so glad that people have been so supportive of my merchandise, especially the keychains! I can't pick a favourite series (cough cough they're my babies after all) but I tend to prefer drawing in the cute chibi style for keychains. It seems more appropriate and are definitely, well, cuter!

My fans and followers definitely motivate me in my drawings and sometimes, I'll end up drawing some characters that they've recommended or some that they've wanted to see in my art style. I really appreciate each and every one who's supported me and my artwork. It means a lot and will serve as encouragement for me to continue drawing.

FaceBook: facebook.com/minorujoeling
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Stayxxxx @Animangaki

Interviewed by: sef
Edited by: Nikki

Animangaki (AMG) is a general ACG event held in Malaysia by a team of very well-organized people. It doesn't feature a lot of BL stuff obviously, so we will focus on Stayxxxx from Taiwan, who was a guest at last year's (2014) event. She's a BL lover and is most well-known for cosplaying beautiful male characters. Thanks to the awesome people at AMG, we got to talk to Stayxxxx, questioning her especially on her BL cosplays and her cat (yes we love cats!) during the media session:

(Why cosplay as Shiki from Togainu no Chi?)
Because I love BL, 'nuff said. A lot of people have been asking me why I don't cosplay as a female character, but I don't think they understand the fact that there are no women in the world of BL.

(How about cosplaying as Yukina from Sekai-ichi Hatsukoi?)
For the same reason. But first, is everyone here fine with BL? (crowd responded positively) Great, then I suppose you know what a Seme and Uke are. (crowd responded positively again) That's good. Personally, I like Uke characters the most but I always choose to cosplay as the Seme counterpart so that I can protect the other character. If I were to cosplay as the Uke, I can't protect or love myself. I love Yukina's character almost as much as his other half so that's why I chose to cosplay his character. But I do prefer Akira more than Shiki.

(Have you considered cosplaying as other BL characters?)
It'll take you three days just to scan through the list of characters that I wish to cosplay one day. I created a list of characters and a photo shooting schedule in Excel, and am constantly adding new characters to it. It didn't take long for me to realize that the list expands quicker than I can shoot. But I do have BL characters on that list and am also open to character ideas from all of you.

(Have you ever worked with other cosplayers on BL works?)
I have lots of friends who like BL, but our opinions often differ. For instance in Free!, I always think that Mako is the Uke and Haru is the Seme, but all my friends think otherwise. When I asked them to help me on a BL cosplay photoshoot, they asked if I can accept doing the opposite role (having Mako as the Seme), but I rejected their idea most of the time. In the end, I always end up cosplaying both characters myself. But once, I did meet a cosplayer who sees Levi (from Attack on Titans) as the Seme, just like I do, and so that photoshoot worked out well.

(Fun question: How much time do you usually spend with your cat?)
All of my time! When I'm making costumes, my cat will sit beside me and keep me company. When I put aside my finished pieces, it'll jump and sleep on them right away, leaving fur on every piece of my costume. My hat has a lot of white fur which I'm too embarrassed to show you now. Lots of my characters have dark colored outfits, so its white fur is even more obvious. There are times when my cat will stand between me and my monitor screen, blocking my view. When I asked it to move away, he gets grumpy.

REVIEW

Ten Count
by Takarai Rihito

Reviewer: DeadlyViolence
Rating 4/5

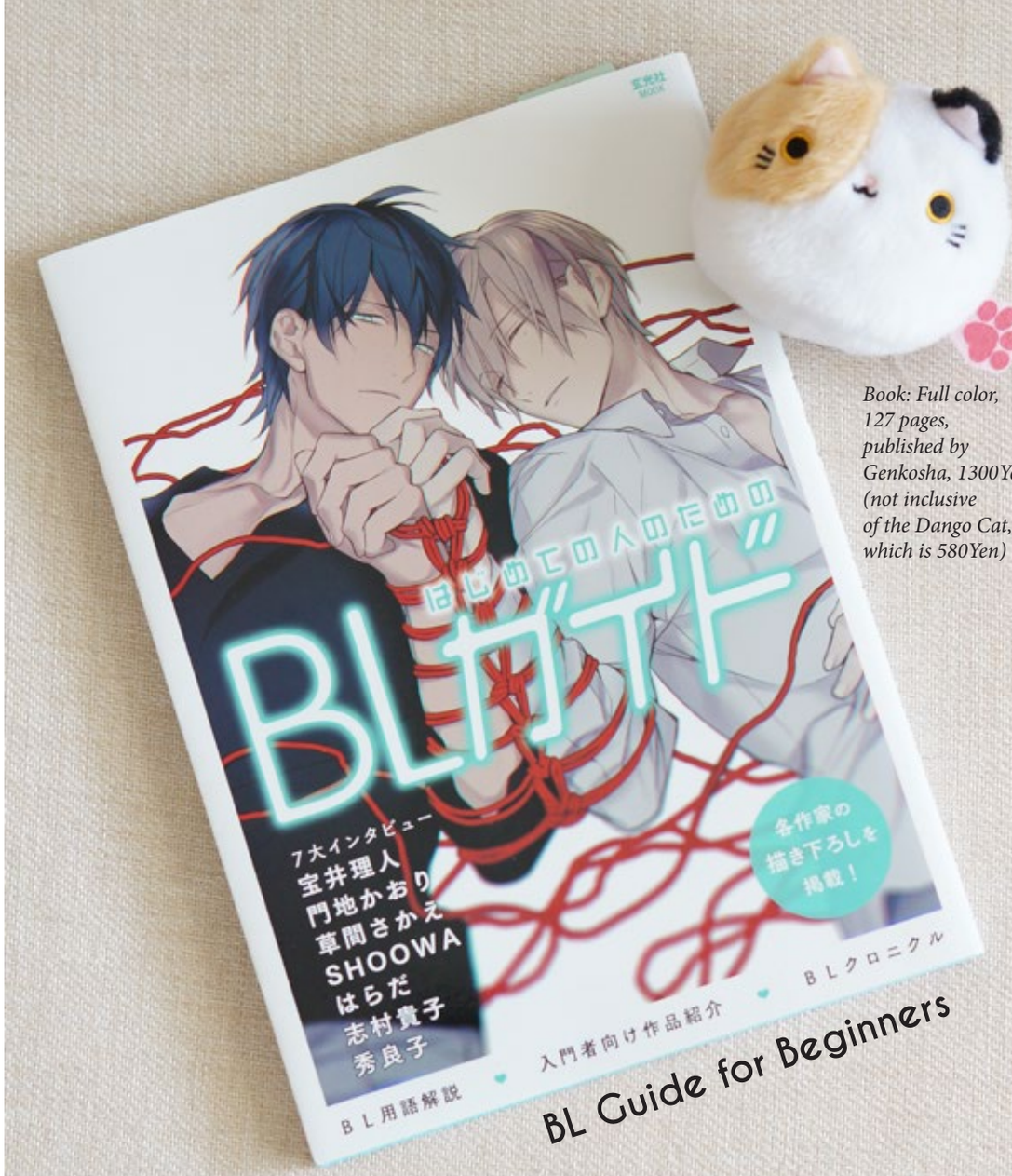
Ten Count is a beautifully drawn, psychologically intriguing manga filled with a slow budding romance. Shirotani Tadaomi suffers from mysophobia; a pathological fear of germs. By chance, he meets counselor Kurose Riku, who immediately recognizes Shirotani's illness. Kurose agrees to help Shirotani overcome his fears and instructs him to write a list of ten challenges Shirotani faces in his daily life. As they work together, romantic feelings begin to blossom. The art is smooth and clean, featuring characters with delicate features. One of the most fascinating themes in this manga is the focus on the human mind and emotions.

Reviewer: Sreaky
Rating 4/5

Creating a much more serious setting by using a mysophobic character in a yaoi manga is what makes this story unique. It raises the question of whether a sexual relationship is even possible in a situation such as this one and thus enhances the characters' development and emotional depth. Upon taking a closer look, the characterization of the two main characters seems rather imbalanced at the moment, as the main focus so far has only been on Shirotani. Yet this criticism does the manga no harm at all, as it is still ongoing and therefore hopefully will focus more on Kurose soon. The art is remarkable and characterized by a combination of simplicity and detailed-ness.

Reviewer: AlexiaLee
Rate: 3/5

Wrapped up in a distinctive and even languid art-style, Ten Count begins when a shy mysophobic man meets a psychiatric counsellor by chance, who proposes him a therapeutic cure. During the treatment sessions, they gradually defy their limits without realizing how those practices start to draw them together. Still an on-going work, the mangaka discloses step by step the characters' true nature, making them surrender to passion until they expose their sordid secrets - the protagonist, in a last gesture of self-restraint, will submissively implore to be defiled. Erotic yet moderate, this is Takarai-sensei's most acclaimed work to date.



Book: Full color, 127 pages, published by Genkosha, 1300Yen (not inclusive of the Dango Cat, which is 580Yen)

BL Guide for Beginners

I personally love the contents of this book! It contains BL information for beginners such as the definition of BL terms, interviews of manga artists, the chronicles of BL, recommendations, BL listings etc. It's only available in Japanese text. So I want to share some bits of what I've read from this book, *from a reader's point of view* – important keywords and parts of Takarai Rihito's interview info (refer to pages 11-14).

KEYWORDS

Edited by Nikki

While a lot of these keywords here can easily be looked up on the internet, we're highlighting several carefully selected words for those who are new to yaoi along with some interesting yet basic information of those keywords/terms. They're further elaborated via the description of roles, settings, and relationships most commonly used in Japanese yaoi stories or terms used in the Japanese context, as seen in the "BL Guide for Beginners" book.

The BASICS

Boy's Love

Boy's Love is most affectionately known as BL. It's more focused on loving relationships or the bond between two male characters. Stories can encompass a lot of different characters, scenarios, and settings resulting in a wide variety of possibilities. The relationship is often shown through scenes where the characters heal each other wounds, make each other happy, have heart throbbing moments, or even experience the passionate love that readers can relate or be attracted to.

Yaoi / 801

Comes from the words Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi which literally mean "No peak (climax), no fall (punch line/denouement), no meaning". It's a common word to fujoshis with 801 being a code word for yaoi, with 8 (from the Japanese number "8", when read as "Yattsu"), 0 (Letter "O") and 1 (from the Japanese number "1", ichi). BL focuses more on love and the actual story, while yaoi is more erotic.

Seme

The one in control or the dominant person in the relationship. Also known as the "top".

Uke

The passive or submissive person in the relationship. Also known as the "bottom".

ROLES you may come across in the genre:

Reversible

The role of the seme and uke aren't fixed, and can be exchanged or reversed at any time. Some people will refer to this as "seke".

SemeSeme/KouKou

Both people in the relationship have the same personality, which are traits of a seme. They will often compete against each other to be on top.

Types of couple RELATIONSHIPS:

Gekokujou

Involves a junior or a person of lower status (than his partner) who's the seme and his senior or a person of higher status as his uke. For example, an employee who's in a relationship with his boss, with the boss being the uke.

Ama-ama

Literally meaning "Sweet sweet". A couple who's inseparable and very sweet together.

Kenkaple

A mixture of Kenka (Fight/Argue) and Kaple (as in Couple). The couple fights a lot but are still on good terms with each other in the relationship.

Kyoudai

The love between two brothers that's tied by blood. They love each other more than regular siblings, aka incest. It's deemed hotter because it's forbidden.

Kyoyu

There are multiple semes sharing one uke's body and heart.

Sand

Simply means "Sandwich" in Japanese. This relationship involves one uke and two semes together. It can also mean that the uke actually loves the two semes at the same time.

Bromance

A combination of the words Brother and Romance. It happens when at least two male characters are extremely close to each other but doesn't always mean that they have to be in a romantic relationship.

Some SETTINGS of yaoi stories:

Ry-Man - Short for "Salary man". Relates to settings around a workplace such as an office. Usually involves the wearing of suits or workplace attire. Relationships are often between a boss and an employee, two office rivals, etc.

Gakuenmono - One of the most popular settings in BL, which is the school environment setting. Most dramas happen in an All-Boys school. They also usually revolve around the student council.

Arab - Is usually associated with a romantic setting involving mainly royal characters such as Kings/Princes or people in the desert. The settings are usually fictional and don't really depict an actual country.

Omegaverse - Frequently takes place in a world where only male characters exist. All the males in this universe have their own role, such as the alpha, beta, and omega, with the omega being the lowest in the hierarchy. The omega tends to release pheromones that may attract a mating partner, resulting in some stories ending up with male pregnancies (m-preg).

Exe-Kei/Highso-Kei - Short for Executive type and High Society type. Related to environments whose characters are the CEO or elite workers who regularly occupy the seme role.

Yakuza - An environment that involves characters that use brute force and muscles. They can look very scary, but at the same time, may be young and good looking. Usually involves more thrilling and erotic scenes.

SPECIAL

Takarai Rihito

SuBLime plans to start releasing Ten Count in August 2016.

About Ten Count

Ten Count was originally called “Beautiful Work”. She got the idea for the name when her friend commented that a celebrity’s work is “beautiful” in a way. She found the idea interesting at that time and even joked about using it as a title for her new manga.

The name wasn’t changed until the manga was close to being published.

The reason for the name change was so as to not have a title about the character’s mysophobia, but rather to have a title that’s similar to the plot; hence why the name Ten Count is closely related to the ten things that the character needs to achieve in this story.

The suit Shirotani wears in the cover art of the first volume isn’t an ordinary salary man/businessman’s suit, but actually a three-piece suit. That’s why the mangaka thought it was more suitable to make Shirotani a secretary.

The characters in Ten Count are older compared to those in her other works such as “Seven Days” and “Only the Flower Knows”, which explains why Ten Count’s characters look more matured, manly, and cool.

Takarai-san wanted to go beyond her creative capabilities. For example, the Ten Count public toilet scene was one of her toughest challenges. She dislikes reading manga in a public toilet, and so used that idea to serve as a backbone for Shirotani’s struggle in that particular scene.

Her work style

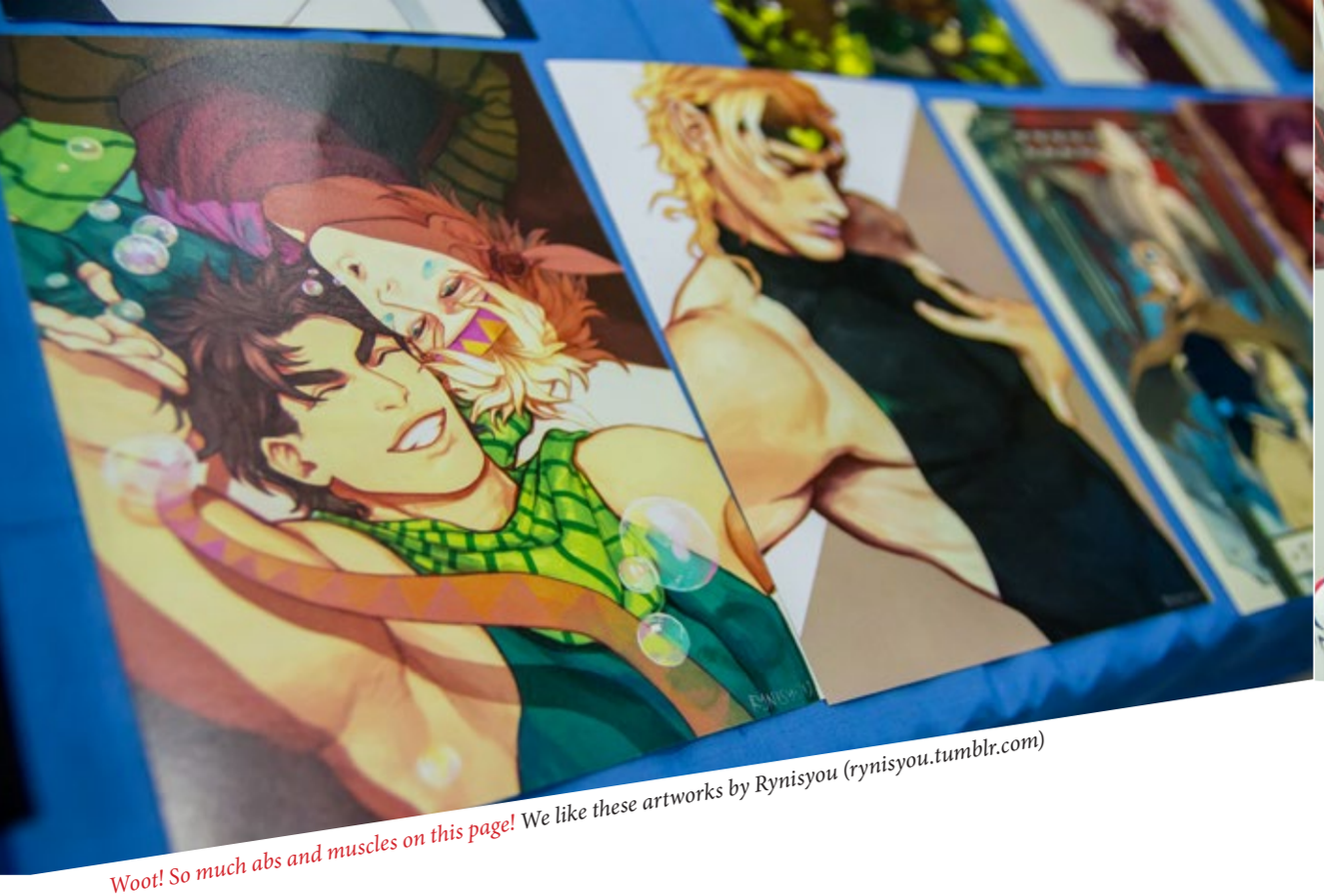
Takarai-san likes to picture the storyboard in her mind before she draws and then imagines the area of the frame the characters will walk to, body placement, and so on. After that, she considers the characters’ actions or poses from different angles; she also finds it helpful to picture everything as if she’s making a film about it.

After that comes the character’s surprised expression at the bottom corner of the page, to increase the suspense, making it a page-turner. She takes anywhere from half a day to three days to colour a page while a monotone (black and white) page only takes from one to five hours. The software she uses to create her works are SAI, Photoshop, and CLIP Studio.

She’s inspired by Nihei Tsutomu’s works, especially ‘Blame’, and it had a great impact on her. To her, ‘Blame’ serves as a background template for most of her works.

Fun Facts:

- During her break time or rest month, she likes to sleep or watch movies.
- Her must-have item to carry around is her iPod.
- She’s recently into convenient shop doughnuts.



Woot! So much abs and muscles on this page! We like these artworks by Rynisyou (rynisyou.tumblr.com)

Sousuke and Rin, cosplayed by Kenneth "Lilaeroplane" Ting and Marcus Montague

Comic Fiesta 2014

December 2014, Malaysia
Reported by Aarin, Edited by Nikki

Covering Comic Fiesta annually has always been great fun and this time was no exception, with an added bonus: I was able to sell the AarinSecret magazine with my team at PenguinFrontier's (PF) booth. That was our first time helping out at PF's booth and we had to keep it non R-18 as per the event's rules, so our items were created in such a way that it could be displayed openly while still catering to our main targets: Fujoshi and fudanshi.

The event ran for 2 days and on both days, we witnessed extremely long queues of visitors waiting to get inside. There were about 49,000 visitors in total and more than 200 booths selling and displaying their creative works. As always, my mission was to search for any BL-related works amongst these booths and although there weren't a lot of new ones, I was happy to find a few talented artists. To be fair, their works weren't exactly BL, but you could see their potential to make a fangirl's heart flutter. There was a particularly cute and small-framed girl whom I met at the very end of the long rows of booths, it was her first time attending an event as an artist. My eyes were so caught up by her interesting style of artwork - the way she drew her characters, mostly male and somewhat mature, that it gave them a darker yet sexier mood. It set off my yaoi radar immediately! So when I asked her "Would you happen to be a fujoshi?" She said "Yes." Online, she goes by the name Rynisyou and I've definitely checked out her site since then. Meanwhile, my friends - Aphin and BlackMonkeyPro's crew were there too. They sold the most BL-related stuff of the entire event and received the most "attention" for sure!

The League of Legends tournament was held there too and occupied a big portion of the event space, and attracted plenty of people to it. On the upper floor of the event hall, another stage was set up for

Left:
League of Legends competition

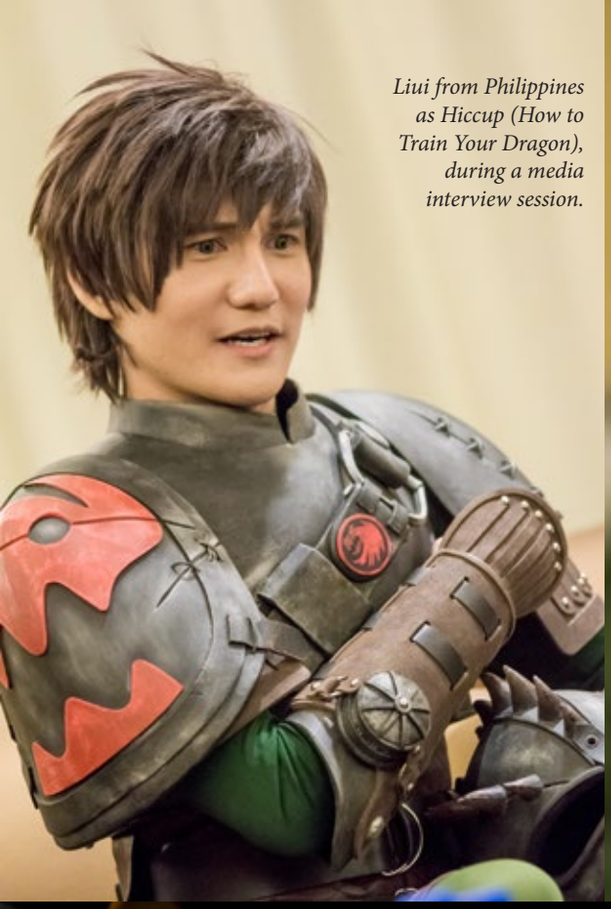
Right:
Benten figurine from ZONE-00 on display at the event
(It's a male character!)

band and cosplay performances and special guest talks. One of the talks I attended was the Square Enix panel which featured the Final Fantasy series, and as some of you may already know, I love the series a lot, so I was pretty excited about it! The game's producer and lead designer were there mainly to promote and talk about FFXV's latest highlights and also to announce the recruiting of talents at Square Enix Japan. During the special mention, they said that FFXV would feature local Malaysian foods such as satay (skewered and grilled meat), roti canai (Indian flatbread), and teh tarik ('pulled tea'), which I found to be interesting.

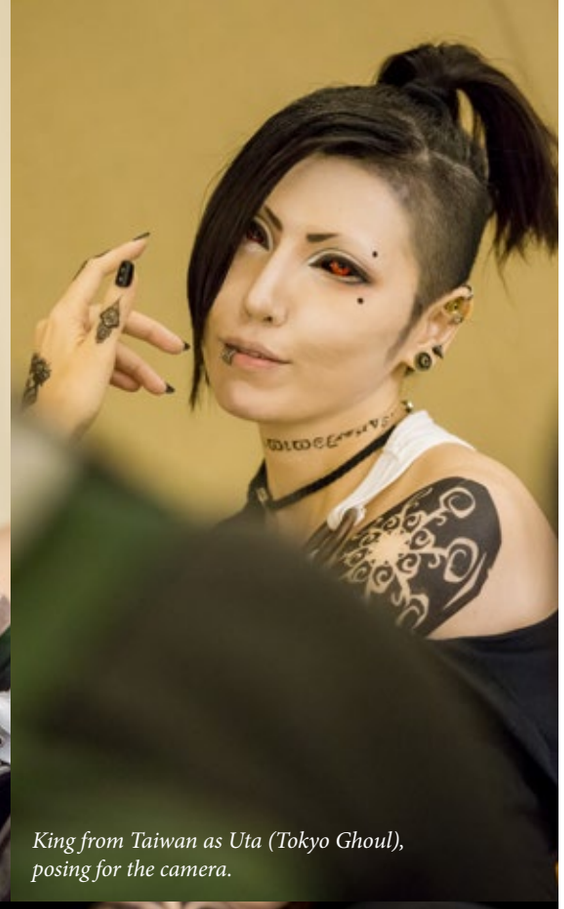
I wasn't scheduled for any interviews this time, but managed to meet up with a guest cosplayer from Taiwan, King, to give her a copy of the previous year's AarinSecret magazine, on which she was featured. The only time I got to see her was during the media interview session with King, Aza Miyuko, Mon, and Liui. During the interview, Aza Miyuko and Mon were very perky, King was being her cool self as always, with Liui on the other hand always adding laughter to the room.

King was asked why she mainly cosplays male characters. In usual King fashion, she said "Because I like BL!" When questioned about the character she's most satisfied with, she replied "My most satisfying work isn't a character but works that involve BL. My partner and I get into our characters very fast and when you look at our photos, you may probably think it only took half an hour to shoot but in reality, it was a lot longer. We both love BL so much so we try our best to make our poses and expressions more accurate during the shoots. So I think my best work is definitely from BL." As an architect during the day, King is very passionate about constructing buildings and her dream is to build a cosplay, anime, and manga paradise where cosplayers can have photo shoots and people with the same interests can go to hang out together. One of my team member's couldn't help it and snuck in a question for King "Would you ever cosplay as a cute or uke BL character?" To which she quickly replied "Huh, me? No! No! No!" (while waving both hands furiously in total denial). Everyone burst out laughing at her cute reaction and gestures. After the interview ended, she spotted me and waved, then came over and bounced her hands on my shoulders and chanted "BL, BL!" It was so unexpected coming from King, but I was happy that somehow, BL always found a way to bring that kind of excitement out of every fan, even her. Having little time to spare, I just passed her the magazine and got her to sign my personal copy.

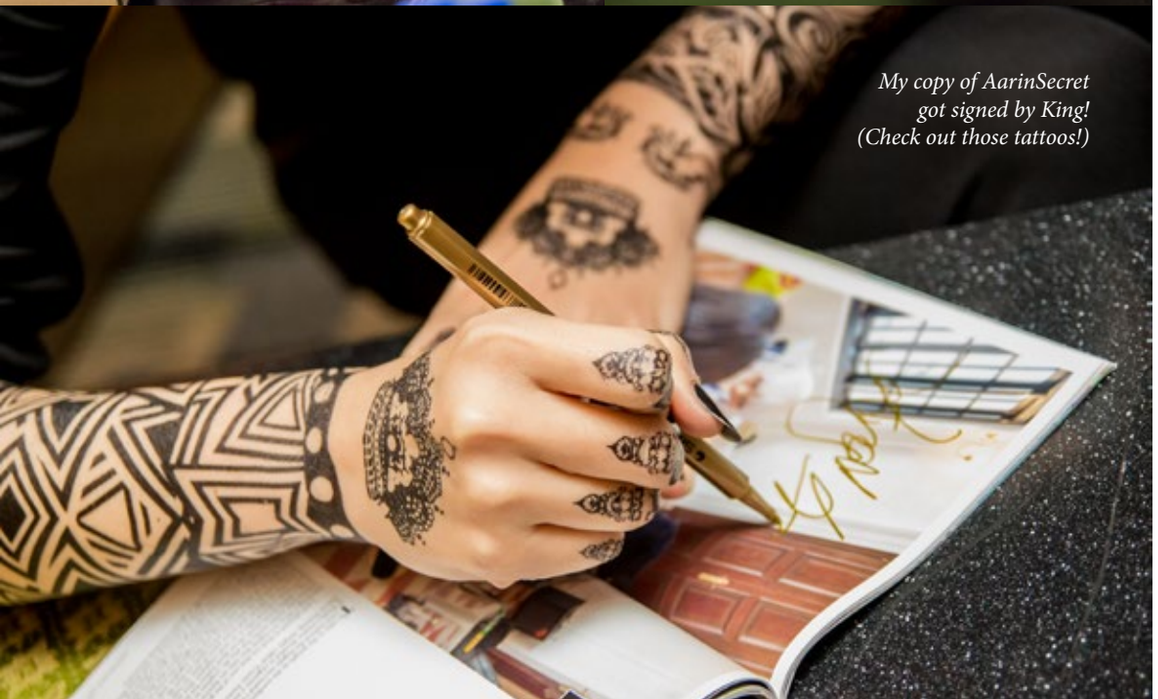
"Would you happen to be a fujoshi?" She said "Yes."



Liui from Philippines as Hiccup (How to Train Your Dragon), during a media interview session.



King from Taiwan as Uta (Tokyo Ghoul), posing for the camera.



My copy of AarinSecret got signed by King! (Check out those tattoos!)

After all the excitement and some other CF activities, my team and I spent the rest of our time at PF's booth selling things. We even organised some lucky draws where winners snagged books from SuBLime. Lots of BL fans came to have a look or simply to chat with us, sharing our sentiments. There were some fun moments too, like when we noticed a guy who kept walking past, looking at the booth many times. One of my team member's waved and chatted with him for a while to make him feel more at ease. In the end, we found out that he was just too shy to approach the booth, how cute was that!? We even had the pleasure of meeting up with Singaporean cosplayer Kenneth "Lilaeroplane" Ting again and took the opportunity to get some shots of him as well.

During the peak hours, the booth was swarmed with people, mainly to buy PF's posters and the featured Haikyuu fanart visual book called Summer Boys.

Everything at the booth was sold out by the end of Day 2! Even PF's huge standee board of his online manga called Faker's Affair was snapped up by a fan of his, seriously, there wasn't a single item left!

Although my team and I didn't get to walk around and explore very much, we were all glad to attend the event together and that we managed to complete our goals: To help PF with his booth, meet up with old friends and new BL fans, pass King her copy of the AarinSecret magazine, and also to discover new local talents, possibly for future collaborations! All in all, a good event to close out the year.

Until the next one!

Penguin Frontier's booth, showcasing Haikyuu fanart and various original artworks!

AarinFantasy team at own booth!

Anicult 2015

June 2015, Surabaya, Indonesia
Reported by Aarin, Edited by Nikki

Special thanks to the Anicult staff and friends for assisting us throughout the event: Chika, Danz, Ika, Amika, Ryuu, Olivia, and the rest of their team.

Nakoto and Kuryu (Japan) as Makoto and Haru from Free!, giving us some fanservice.

Anicult is an annual exhibition of Japanese toys, hobbies, culture, anime, and cosplay. This year, it was held in Surabaya and was made extra special with appearances by some very special guests invited from all over Asia. Anicult staff member Chika told us that Anicult had very humble beginnings, having started off with just a team of only 8 people. Thankfully for them, it has slowly expanded from there. The event is further made possible due to their love of the BL genre, as all of them are fujoshis and fudanshis themselves. The 2014 event was a very messy one and the staff wanted so badly to give it another go and just make it better all around. So this year's event was their way of saying: "Here we go again, please give us another chance!" In their minds, Anicult is like a party and they just want a lot of people to come and have fun and make it into a wonderland, a place where people can get lost in for a day or two and just have fun together with others. It's not just for the audience but also for all the exhibitors, the guests, and the staff too. The special guests for the 2015 event were Nekota Yonezou (one of Libre's popular Japanese BL mangaka), and several cosplayers: Baozi and Hana (China), Pinky Lu Xun (Indonesia), DDTenka (Singapore), Reach and Asuka (South Korea), Nakoto and Kuryu (Japan). Surabaya was selected as the location for the event as the government there isn't as strict as in other parts of Indonesia, making it the ideal host location for yaoi-related events.

With such an amazing line-up of guests, the AarinFantasy crew flew to Indonesia to attend the event and to interview the guests. While there, we even opened up a booth just for giveaways which included some prizes generously sponsored by SuBLime. The booth also featured my very own original character who I named Edge Windcross. Edge was quite a big hit at the booth, and drew a lot of attention from curious on-lookers wanting to know more about him. Anicult 2015 was a 2-day event and over the course of both days, we hosted a total

of three lucky draw sessions to anyone who signed up at the booth approximately 30 minutes prior to each session. Lucky winners received either a copy of the previous AarinSecret magazine or a random manga title from SuBLime. We didn't expect such a great turnout for the lucky draw sessions! It seems that Indonesian fans are extremely passionate about yaoi! We were so touched by the response that we felt so blessed to be there; getting to experience such awesomeness and meet new friends or fellow fans.

The special guests each had their own panel talk, autograph, and photography sessions. The only downside was that Nekota-sensei didn't want her picture taken as she wanted to keep things more discreet. My team and I were lucky enough to be granted the privilege of having private interviews with the guests, so read on as we share those exclusive interviews with you! *(page 25-38)*

Overall, this year's Anicult was a very fun event for everyone and to witness such scenes of extreme excitement really took it to the next level, or at least it was to me. You really should attend the next Anicult event to experience it for yourself, especially if the feature is something yaoi-related, I'm not kidding, it's a must-go!

REACH and Asuka (South Korea) as Mitsutada and Tsurumaru from Touken Ranbu, greeting fans and having fun at the press-con session.

Pics on this page: The true passion of fujoshi and fudanshi during Anicult!

Exclusive Interview with
Nekota Yonezou

During the Anicult gathering in Surabaya a few months ago, we were given the great opportunity to sit down with Nekota-sensei for a private interview to talk to her about her fans, her daily life, and of course, her work!

Interviewed by Erisa
Edited by Nikki

What do you think of the English or non-Japanese speaking communities that likes yaoi? Do you think they're different from the Japanese yaoi fans?
Nekota: I attended an event in Italy 2 years ago, and that was my first time meeting overseas fans. I think that they're not very different from Japanese fans. Although I can't speak Italian, I felt their warmth and it was very enjoyable. Perhaps if I were to compare, overseas fans are more direct in expressing themselves about the things that they love.

Then Sensei, do you feel the love from your fans?
Nekota: Very much! I also have Twitter and a lot of my followers are from different countries such as Mexico and South America where they arrange a lot of fan meetings amongst themselves. I frequently receive photos of such meetings and everyone seems to be very active and lively during those events.

Do you plan to publish your works in English?
Nekota: For the English versions, I'll leave it to the publisher's decision. If there's a demand for it, we won't turn it down and I do wish to release more of my works in English.

(Here are some questions we've compiled from forum members who are big fans of yours.)

AlexiaLee asked: Could you tell us a bit about your creative process please? When you start creating a new series, what exactly triggers that idea? Do you start with a situation/plot you fantasize about? Or do you start with the type of characters you'd like to see interacting with each other, for instance: perverted uke with glasses + yandere seme etc?
Nekota: If it's a series, there are several ways to go about it. If I'd like to create some anticipation or a link from one character to another, then I'll start by creating the characters first. However, if I were to draw for another series and there's a particular story I'd like to tell, then I'll start with the storyline and the character design will come after that. So it really depends on the series that I'm working on.

cabbit_girl asked: Many of your characters wear briefs, have you ever wanted to make them wear boxers or even fundoshi?
Nekota: In fact, I've created a lot of different characters, however, characters wearing briefs seem to have a bigger impact. In terms of characters, I'd say there are about 4 characters I've drawn in briefs. I've drawn characters wearing boxers too in the past, but not fundoushi, and I'd like to try to draw that at least once.

Kadaj-chan asked: Which is harder for you when portraying a scene(s) in your work; romantic/sentimental moments or hardcore moments? As in, do you feel a bit shy when it comes to more hardcore scenes or does it take you time and energy to figure out the best way to portray the soft emotional moments between your characters?
Nekota: Hardcore's more challenging to draw but personally, I really love to read hardcore works. However, during output, if I were to draw it, it somehow becomes more romantic instead. And in fact, I have a lot of hardcore collections that can never be shown to my parents. *soft laugh*

Are you a morning or a night person? (especially when it comes to work)
Nekota: I prefer to work at night because it's quieter. Other than that, I'm also staying with my parents, so when I work during the day time, they occasionally come into my workspace, which disturbs my concentration and I find it hard to refocus on my work. At night, there are less disturbances and I'm able to make better progress.

Are you a caffeine addict/whatever else, during working hours or do you not have a must-have?
Nekota: Coffee perhaps. I usually make a cup of coffee for myself before I start working. And also, when working on drafts or drawing lines, I'll put on an American serial drama DVD as I work.

Custom-made cookies for Nekota-sensei by a fan!

Would you mind sharing what drama you're watching at the moment?
Nekota: Just before I got here, I was watching the last season of Dexter, it's about a serial killer and I really love that show.

sef asked: Some of your works were turned into Drama CDs too i.e. Otona Keikenchi, and Elektel Delusion, and Hidoku Shinaide. Were you involved in the seiyuu cast selection as you created the characters and would have an idea of which seiyuu's voices fit your characters the most?
Nekota: At first, we decide on a wishlist of seiyuus based on the characters' image and personality. It's always best if we get our wishlist but of course there are times when the list is rejected and a different cast is assigned instead.

Are there any seiyuus that you like?
Nekota: There are a lot of seiyuus that I like. However, I think that I become an even bigger fan after meeting them and seeing them in action. Even though I may have liked them before meeting them, after witnessing the way they work, I really grow to like them even more.

Did the seiyuus who voiced your characters meet your expectations?
Nekota: Rather than saying that they met my expectations, it's better to say that the characters were portrayed from a different perspective. I feel that they're being voiced in a way which suits the characters more and which is different from the manga.

What's the most satisfying thing to you as a BL manga artist?
Nekota: I think that'll be the warm feelings and support I get from my readers. I heard that for the usual serialized series, if it's released over a span of 1 or 2 years, it tends to be forgotten by the readers. However, for BL manga readers, they're always waiting and anticipating the next release of the story. When we released the latest chapter, I received a tweet from a Twitter reader saying, "Thank God, you're still alive." *laughs* That shows that the readers are always patiently waiting to buy the latest releases. I think that the thoughts and feelings I receive give me a sense of relief and satisfaction as a BL manga artist.

You might be attached to your characters. Is it challenging for you to detach yourself from your current work to develop a new character/storyline?
Nekota: No, I don't think that's a difficult thing for me to do. I like to have a cup of tea or coffee and just close my eyes and think quietly for a while. And while I'm thinking, there may be a lot of things going on around me, like people talking, that I can overhear and unconsciously, an idea can just come to me. Furthermore, there are times that I'm inspired by the things happening around me and this makes it easier for me to draw those scenes. However, if I'm working concurrently on different projects at the same time, then it can be quite challenging to develop a new character or storyline.

Dr. Muraki asked: You have a lot of interesting characters. Were any of them based on someone you know?
Nekota: Well, the character Nemugasa in Hidoku Shinaide (who wears spectacles) was in fact created based on my assistant's brother as a model. He's from a very good university in Japan and all he does is study. Due to his lack of people skills, it seems that it's hard for him to find a job. When I heard about it, I felt sad for her brother. After that, unconsciously, Nemugasa was born based on some of those characteristics and ended up being a studious student with very little communication skills.

lynixe asked: I enjoy your works a lot, and am especially a fan of your Prince of Tennis doujinshi (Inui x Kaidoh). I find that you gave the doujinshi a very in-depth plot and lots of emotion, leading them to being a short series of their own too. Do you find it difficult to give your doujinshi in-depth emotions and conflicts due to the fact that it's meant to be short and standing on its own as a one-shot? What helps you to determine which doujinshi should stand as a one-shot, while another one should be included as a short series?
Nekota: The length of a story generally depends on how much time I have between deadlines, such as after finishing work on one manga and before the next event date. Furthermore, I also have to consider how much I can draw and the pages that I can fit in within that timeframe. For example, if I only have 2 weeks to complete it, which is a short period of time, then I'd think of the content and how to make the doujinshi more exciting. And if it's compact, then whether or not there should be more ecchi scenes and so on. If I have a longer timeframe, then I'm able to draw a doujinshi with a proper storyline instead.

Does this mean that the length of the doujinshi isn't decided on from the start?
Nekota: Yes, occasionally I do have doujinshi which continues for a few books but also have some that ended as a one-shot.

domanager asked: If you were to pick between the 2 couples in Hidoku Shinaide, which one is your favourite and why?
Nekota: That depends on which couple I'm working on at that moment. For example, until recently, I was working a lot on Akira & Shimakawa and so, was really engrossed with them at that time. However, when I work on Maya & Nemu, I'll feel that I really like them as a pair. So it really depends.

Is there a reason behind Maya's hair colour change in Hidoku Shinaide?
Nekota: *laughs* I'm worried that the fans will be disappointed if I explain the real reason behind it.

We'd be grateful if Sensei wouldn't mind disclosing that piece of information.
Nekota: To be honest, right before the change in Maya's hair colour, I injured my right wrist as I'd overused it and it was really painful for me to draw at that time. Sometimes the pain was so bad, it felt as if my little finger would just drop off my hand. During that period, and because Maya has blonde hair, there were a lot of lines to be drawn for the inside of his hair and it was very painful for me. So I thought that if I were to make his hair black, I could draw fewer lines and it would be easier. Then, when it came to changing Maya's hair colour to black from blonde, I felt that there needed to be a strong reason for the transformation. In the end, we decided to make Maya change his hair colour because of Nemugasa.

How about leaving the lines to your assistants?
Nekota: I prefer to draw the lines myself than leave it to my assistants because it's difficult and sometimes it comes out as if Maya is wearing a wig which is very different from what I want.

Any hints on a future release?
Nekota: This year, I'm working a lot on Hidoku Shinaide but next year I'll be working on another title called Okama Seme. I'd like to continue on that title and make it into a comic.

Are there any plans to continue Michiru Heya?
Nekota: Oh yes, if there's time and opportunity. That title didn't have a lot of lovey dovey scenes in it and if I have the chance, I will work on it.

A signed hand fan by Nekota-sensei during the event

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DDTENKA & PINKY'S TAKE ON BL

When did you start to like BL?

Pinky: For as long as I can remember, since I was a little girl, and especially since I started cosplaying, I already liked BL. At that time, I didn't know much about BL but when I started watching anime and playing games, I started fantasizing that one male character would look great with another male character, like they're in some romantic relationship or something special like that!

DDTenka: I remember that my first yaoi manga, Zetsuai, was during my primary schooling days. At that time, I didn't know what BL was. I thought that it's fine as long as they love each other and don't care about each other's gender. After that, during high school, I started reading yaoi manga that had a lot of explicit scenes in it.

What's your favourite BL anime, manga, or game?

DDTenka: A game called Lucky Dog, because I like the artist a lot. She also created a lot of other games that I like as well. I even remember all of the games' storylines.

Pinky: I read a lot of doujinshi, because I like to play games and watch animes too. Currently, I am into Touken Ranbu. It is not a BL game, but I read a lot of doujinshi of it. What I like about doujinshi is that anything and everything is possible. Speaking of manga, I really like the artist, Ayano Yamane the most because her work is so hardcore. It's also because softcore yaoi is not working for me anymore. I don't only like her work because it's hardcore but also because I like her artwork and storylines very much. I like how she draws her semes because they are very beautiful.

Who is your favourite BL or slash pairing?

Pinky: I have a lot, so I'm not sure who to choose but my first OTP is Asami and Takaba, so I will say that they are probably one of my favourite pairings.

DDTenka: There are a lot for me too. Hmm, I will say it will be Makoto and Haru from Free!

Have you both been given a hard time for liking BL or being a fujoshi?

Pinky: I think because I am honestly an open-minded person, I will tell people that this is who I am and that I am a fujoshi, so if you like me then that's fine and if you don't like it, it's okay too. From time to time, I get a lot of fans who are mostly fujoshi and my male fans are okay with that but they will just say "Pinky, please don't show us that." Then I will be like "Why? This is so beautiful!" So I don't think I'm given a hard time for being a fujoshi because I am always honest with myself and the people around me about what I like and what I don't. For example, I'll tell them that I don't like yuri but like yaoi. People will ask me why and I will say "Because I'm a woman, because I like to see men, especially naked men, and their beep beep, so it's a normal thing."

DDTenka: Yes, I understand Pinky's sentiment! For me, I don't get a hard time too. My parents don't know about this "hobby" of mine but all of my friends know.

Pinky, I know you've cosplayed as Ruruka from Crimson Spell before, have you cosplayed as any other BL characters before or after that?

Pinky: Other than that occasion, I haven't actually cosplayed any other BL characters because BL characters are mostly too manly for me. But in Ruruka's case, he's more feminine and cute. And I am also envious of Ruruka as he gets to be with Havi and Vald and all those handsome men. At that time, I was invited to attend a yaoi con in Malaysia, so I decided to cosplay Ruruka and managed to finish his costume in one week. I had a lot of fun cosplaying as him and would like to do that again if I get the chance. Although, a lot of people will tell me not to cosplay as male characters during events.

DDTenka, have you cosplayed BL characters before?

DDTenka: Actually I've done quite a lot, such as Ten Count and Lucky Dog. I also did a BL scene for Haikyuu. In the future, I'd like to cosplay a character from a Chinese BL manga called 19 Days.

Pinky: And we're also doing a Touken Ranbu cosplay together tomorrow (at Anicult), which to me, is already BL in my mind.

DDTenka, a forum member asked about your underwater scene photoshoot. Was it difficult and how did you make it look as if you were doing it with such ease?

DDTenka: I just do it without thinking too much. Actually, I did 3 of such photoshoots before. The first one was short because the security guard came and didn't allow us to shoot at the swimming pool. Then the sex…err, I mean the second one…we were in a hotel, so no one was there. I tried opening my eyes underwater and after a while, got used to it. Then the next one was for Free! because it was so popular at that time, so I tried shooting underwater again and by then, I was already used to doing it, so no problems there.

Are there any cosplayers that you look up to?

DDTenka: All of the cosplayers who are here in Anicult (such as Pinky, Baozi, Hana, Asuka, Reach, Kuryu, and Nakoto). I've been a fan of Asuka's for 5-6 years now and even stalked her from a Korean blog called Cure and all the way to Twitter.

Pinky: There are a lot of cosplayers that I like. My computer is just full of BL and cosplayers' pictures. I have too many to mention one by one but I like cosplayers who cosplay some kind of BL character and I do stalk them sometimes!

Top: DDTenka as Taroutachi (photo by Nik Yan)
Bottom: Pinky as Midare Toushirou (photo by ShinjiX)

BAOZI &HANA

Interviewed by sef & Erisa
Edited by Nikki

Both Baozi and Hana have been into BL since middle school, with Hana particularly liking the "Junjou Romantica" anime and the "Sweet Pool" game. Baozi on the other hand likes the "Only the Flower Knows" manga and the "DRAMAtical Murder" game. We managed to chat with them on a more personal note about their cosplays and BL and also delved into their actual personalities and opinions on certain things.

How do you feel after cosplaying for four years as a duo since your debut in 2001?
B: Time flies! We started out as solo cosplayers, but after pairing up, we haven't really done a lot of cosplays with others. We've been through a lot together and we'd like to keep on improving ourselves.
H: I think life changes, a lot. When I first started out, I only cosplayed for myself. But things changed after we teamed up and I feel lucky to be able to find someone like him.

Do you remember the first anime/cosplay convention you attended?
B: It was in an International Anime Convention in Hangzhou, which is Hana's hometown. We attended as guests and he noticed me for the first time at that event!
H: Before we were invited as guests to conventions such as these, we attended a lot of privately-organised conventions and events as well.
B: Our first convention together as a duo was at China-Joy in 2011 and we cosplayed as Masamune Date and Yukimura Sanada from Basara. We'd only communicated online before our first appearance at that convention, so it's definitely left a huge impression on us.

Baozi (left) as Kurose and Hana (right) as Shirotani from Ten Count with AarinSecret magazine!

What's the most memorable convention to the both of you?
H: It should be AFA.
B: That's correct, because it was the first time we attended a convention abroad. It felt so different from the ones in China and we had a blast. Ever since that experience, we've become more active in attending foreign conventions.

So, what was the difference between the conventions in China and the ones abroad?
B: The conventions in China are more focused on cosplay and the location of the event itself. Their competitions often involve 20 to 30 performing cosplayers and might take anywhere between 15 to 20 minutes per team. It felt really long. Unlike conventions and cosplay events outside of China that have a lot of other activities like Q&A sessions and so on. We've recently realised that the conventions in China have changed a lot since then.
H: We received a lot of invitations from other countries but couldn't attend a lot of them due to our studies.
B: We're currently studying in Singapore so there are lots of places we can't go to, especially ones that are too far away. To even attend conventions around South East Asia, we have to take a flight around noon, right after our classes.

Have you gained anything from attending these conventions abroad?
H: I'd say that we have more freedom to cosplay the characters we like. In China, people doubted if we really like BL to cosplay as those characters. We were often judged by them, thinking that we just wanted the attention. We felt very embarrassed at that time and stopped doing BL characters for a while. Luckily, we met a lot of people just like us outside of China, and most of them are very supportive. The best thing that's ever happened to us is how people out there are more willing to understand our feelings and not judge us. However, there are still a lot of people in China who think we're doing BL cosplays for the fame.
B: We don't really like to explain to people on social media websites because the more you explain, the more they'll doubt you. So we tend to have fun and just show off our intimate pictures.
H: Exactly, we tend to have more courage to do what we like.

What's the most memorable character you've cosplayed as?
H: There are a lot of characters that have left a deep impression on me; however, my personal favourite would be Makoto and Haru (1) from Free!
B: That's right. These characters reflect a lot of our actual selves. We binge-watched Free! when it first came out. Back then, I wasn't able to fully immerse myself into Makoto's character so I didn't cosplayed him well. As I kept improving, I finally got it right! This is the art of cosplaying, you just have to keep trying and slowly blend yourself into the character and make it perfect!
H: I often feel that there are many characters I'm fond of and seek Baozi's opinion if I should attempt to cosplay that character or not. Baozi always says "I'll pass on that character but you should give it a go. As long as you put on the right makeup, dress and accessorize properly, just leave the rest to the photographer!" To me, the essence of cosplaying doesn't lie in the outcome per se, but the effort you pour into the character-making process holistically, it makes me really happy. Personally, I'm very fond of makeup therefore experimenting on a character's makeup tops my list when I'm attempting and researching a new character. Cosplaying as a female character leaves a greater impact on me as it requires a greater effort on my part compared to my usual cosplay. I struggled the most with my first attempt as Elsa (2) from the Disney movie Frozen. I wanted to cosplay the male version of Elsa too.
B: We even prepared the costume and wig.
H: But every time I was about to attempt it, it just didn't feel right! I wasn't able to get the feeling I desired throughout the whole process. There was no satisfaction with the gender-bender Elsa. My friend told me the reason I was into Elsa was due to the originality of the character itself, so if I changed the character too much, to the extent of changing her gender, I wouldn't be able to get the feeling right.
B: That's why if you want to cosplay her, you have to cosplay the original Elsa!
H: Actually, I don't really like to wear women's clothing but…
B: Hana has a lot of cross-play (CP) he adores, not just from BL but also straight characters aka "boy-girl" (BG).
H: Sometimes, I'll pair up with my female friends for BG cosplays. But it just doesn't feel right! Maybe I just want to pair up with Baozi!
B: We ARE a pair in most cosplays!

Is there a character that you really wanted to attempt but you thought wasn't suitable?
B: There's a character I'm really fond of which is Guren from Shounen Onmyoji but currently am unable to do that. His upper body is semi-naked and very muscular! It's impossible for me to cosplay him in my current state but I'm working hard towards my goal (Baozi revealed that he frequents the gym!)
H: No, I don't think there's a character that I can't cosplay as; however, the time factor and suitability of venue are the 2 major hindrances for us. For instance, we've always wanted to cosplay "Seven Days" but can't find a suitable location for it in Singapore. Plus, the majority of Singaporean photographers are male. They're really nice and take great photos but every single photoshoot we just…
B: We felt really weird…
H: Yeah, but back in China, we're really close to one particular fujoshi photographer as we share a lot of topics in common. It's really an awesome feeling to meet a photographer who understands our desires for a character. Prior to a photoshoot, we'd discuss the character and the feelings we want to portray and as a result, we're better able to understand the character and more ideas for the photoshoot would spring up from that shared knowledge.
B: She's helped us with the photoshoots for "Only the Flower Knows" and "Adekan".
H: Usually, we're the ones who guide our photographers.
B: For instance, we usually need to show the male photographer a few manga pages as reference and then instruct them on the angles and positions we want captured during the photoshoot.
H: Of course, we're really grateful that they're willing to shoot for us.

In cosplaying, is there a line that you will never cross? The context here isn't limited to cosplay poses but more to a certain character or genre that you won't cosplay?
B: We don't like BL that's too intense. Hana likes it "purer".
H: Some are still okay, as I mainly rely on the storyline. But I really dislike the feeling of turning those originally "pure" storylines into some intense cosplay. We're open to people's thoughts and ideas but at the same time, we must remain true to ourselves.

The seme-uke rule is obvious between the both of you. Ever thought of switching roles maybe in one of the photoshoots or have you already tried this before?
Both: We're considering this for Seven Days (3).
H: In Seven Days, I feel like the seme-uke role isn't too apparent. Generally, readers distinguish the black-haired and taller-built character (Seryou Touji) as the uke and the blonde-haired guy (brown-haired/lighter-haired) (Shino Yuzuru) as the seme. Everyone

Baozi, Hana and DDTenka enjoying themselves during Nekota-sensei's panel talk

Baozi giving Hana a Pikachu birthday cake (courtesy of Baozi & Hana's Indonesia Fan Club)

feels that way but Seryou Touji's character screams seme! That's why it's really hard to distinguish their roles. Due to my love for these 2 characters, I asked a friend - how do we (Baozi and myself) decide who is who? My friend replied "Theoretically build-wise, you're more like Seryou but height-wise, you should be Shino Yuzuru!"

Both of you are "bold" in your photoshoots – you're very expressive and have attempted many daring poses:
(i) Ever thought about creating a BL video?
B: No, we haven't considered that at the moment. Maybe in the future if we have a very close relationship with a photographer…
H: No, no, no…I'd be embarrassed!
B: As things are different when there's motion involved, it'll be embarrassing.

(ii) Have you ever considered publishing a more manga-ish photobook which might involve dialogue?
B: Not at this point in time. Cosplay involves shootings of various combinations. There'll be scenes that are less relevant, it might be a field scene, or sometimes a close-up shot, that's why it'll be weird to create a storyboard, it won't feel the same.
H: In fact, if I manage to complete a photoshoot, I'm overjoyed.
B: Yes, we'll be very happy. If we were to segment it, it'll destroy the whole scene.
H: We're quite satisfied with the current state of the photoshoot, it feels like a "static film" without any dialogue.
B: Well, a picture is worth a thousand words!

(iii) What gives you the courage? Like the bathtub scene for "Junjou Romantica" and the mermaid scene for "Free!" in the Sunny Days photobook?
B: Probably, we just wanted to perfect those roles!
H: Actually, we ARE that bold.
B: There's nothing TOO exaggerated, right!? *panics*
H: The most crucial factor's still the photographer.
B: the photographer was a guy. He had to stand on top of the bathtub to take the shots, so he had a greater challenge. We were just having fun. As for Sunny Days, we admit that the cover shot was a bit bold.
H: It's really bold. I was uncomfortable putting on the merman tail, let alone to wear it out in the open at the seaside! Back then, there were many onlookers, one kid even ran towards me, pointed at me, and shouted "Mermaid", I felt really embarrassed!
B: We acted on an impulse while the people weren't paying attention to us. I carried Hana, occasionally taking some shots in between.
H: Comparatively, that photo series was taken within a very short time frame so I wasn't fully satisfied with it but am very fond of the Sunny Days cover shot.
B: We like it a lot. The photoshoot took place in Singapore at a slightly remote beach.
H: I think Singapore is very suitable for a "Free!" cosplay photoshoot.

Where do you get the inspiration for your cosplay poses? Do they originate from the storyline itself?
B: Generally, we don't add any elements to the role. We just follow the original works. We'll allocate some time to research the manga then save the scenes and storyline that we want to use for photoshoot purposes. Then, it's easier for us to get inspired during the actual photoshoot.

H: Personally, I like those scenes where it felt as though we were about to kiss but actually didn't. Some of our fans were like "They should have kissed, but why didn't they, just kisssss already!" I like this kind of feeling of keeping a distance, like "so close, yet so far" ya know.

To Baozi: Would you consider joining Hana in cross-dressing for example, Love Live?
To Hana: What do you think about cross-dressing since you do it a lot?
B: No, as I have really broad shoulders, if I cross-dressed I'd look like a King Kong version of Barbie! Hana's always wanted me to cosplay a Love Live character with him but just no! It's really not suitable.
H: To be honest, I'm not a cross-dresser. I'm usually clothed in male attire. I'm a real man!
B: Unless it's for a female character that Hana's really fond of.
H: Actually, there are many characters I'm fond of but I can't cosplay them with Baozi. So I've no choice but to pair up with girls for it.

Could you describe yourself - when you're cosplaying and your true self?
H: When cosplaying, I try to suit the characters holistically. In actual fact, my characteristics change drastically as I'm a Gemini. Sometimes, I can be extremely cheerful and sometimes I'm very indifferent. When cosplaying, I try my best to act out that character well. When not cosplaying or around strangers, I'm really shy and may look a little cold around them. At first, my friends disliked me as I'm a loud speaker, but I'm a very cheerful person, sort of like a cat. When someone approaches me, I'm always on my guard but I'll also try to make friends with you. But if you don't come over and look for me, I'll just stay put by myself. As for Baozi, he changes a bit to suit the cosplay character. However, his true nature doesn't change much overall. For instance, when he cosplayed Kurose from Ten Count, I told him (his character) that he should be cold and detached, but he still smiled happily. Then, someone took his smiley Kurose photo and asked Takarai Rihito-sensei if she'd consider giving Kurose such a smile. I felt really bad for Sensei as it's difficult to control what appears online and he really couldn't control himself. Do you have anything else to add to that, Baozi?
B: More or less what you've just said. *smiles at Hana*
H: We're quite different. Characteristically, I'm like a cat while Baozi's like a dog. He'll attach himself to you every day and do whatever you ask him to. To me, he's very obedient. However, to some friends, he's a bully. The people Baozi bullies usually come to me to take their side and stand up for them.

The interview ended there as it was time for the car to take them to another venue. Although our time with the boys was short, (we still had more to ask them!) we're really glad that they were willing to share their thoughts with us. They seemed to know and understand each other so well they could speak for one another. Do support their cosplay by purchasing their merchandise or by leaving comments on their social media sites. Special thanks goes to Anicult for arranging this interview right after the event's press-conference session and Hana's early birthday celebration (by the Baozi and Hana Indonesia Fan Club).

1: Check out Baozi & Hana's Sunny Days for more photos of them as Makoto (Baozi) & Haru (Hana).
2: Check out Baozi & Hana's Love Letter.
3: They cosplayed Seven Days, link: https://goo.gl/NOl8PD

"Some of our fans were like "They should have kissed, but why didn't they, just kisssss already!"

Prints for sale during the event - fanart of Rin and Haru from Free! and original "Fabulous" artwork, by Rachel Huey

EVENT

NIJIKAI 2015

Pearl International Hotel, Malaysia
August 2015
Reported by Aarin, Edited by Nikki

My team of 5 and I attended the annual BL event in Malaysia, this time purely called Nijikai 2015, minus the "Sawachi" name in front. The event featured local talents who draw BL artworks, resellers selling yaoi and fans-interest merchandise, and even a T-shirt printing company that sells yaoi related clothing. The reason why the AarinFantasy team was there was not only to cover the event's report, but also to sell some of our preloved yaoi items there. Items included Limited Edition merchandise, mangas and doujins (English and Japanese), keychains, as well as a few choice Nendos. Our booth merchandise sales were also reinforced by items sponsored by Kashinosei@LiveJournal. In the end, we managed to sell quite a lot of our stuff! AarinFantasy also sponsored a large quantity of SuBLime manga and some Touken Ranbu keychains by Minoru JoeLing as prizes for the events' quizzes and contests (fanfiction writing, drawing, and singing).

Event-goers who were at first freely walking around began to gather around the small stage area to participate in the Yaoi 101 Quiz and later, the "Guess the Seiyuu" quiz. The quizzes quickly caught people's attention because the questions were very funny with witty answer selections and of course, the 3 emcees for the event (Naito, Serena, and Leena) were very good at what they do, spurring the crowd on and adding to the frenzy.

Sakuya as Mikazuki Munechika (Touken Ranbu)

The event featured two cosplayers; Sakuya from Japan and Plallen from Thailand, both cosplaying as Touken Ranbu characters. Visitors were happy to have the opportunity to catch a glimpse and even mingle around with them. Plallen and a few other local singers also sang onstage, entertaining the crowd. Sakuya on the other hand, was busy signing her photobook and taking pictures with her fans.

She's most famous for her accurate male character cosplays. We managed to have a short two-on-one (translator included) interview/chat with Sakuya.

Sakuya started reading BL mangas during her elementary school days. She actually prefers straight pairings but mentioned that she likes BL a lot. Initially, she started by pairing characters from non-BL mangas together rather than those from actual BL mangas. [We all have to start somewhere right? Ken & Barbie or Prince Charming & the Princess etc] She prefers this kind of direction compared to original BL works (aka slash). She's a big fan of Levi x Eren from Attack on Titan.

Sakuya seldom does photoshoots centered on BL, but there are some lighter BL shoots that she's done in the past such as Sebastian x Ciel and Claude x Alois from Black Butler. She also mentioned that she's done some BL shoots using her own original characters! Sakuya likes taking on both seme and uke roles; when she cosplayed with Shimizu-san (the girl who cosplayed Ciel in the Black Butler shoot), Sakuya was the seme, but when she's with Zumi-san (another cosplayer friend of hers), Sakuya plays the part of the uke. Although she has fun doing both, she actually prefers to cosplay as the uke. [We think that ukes have more fun too Sakuya!]

"There are some people who don't use Twitter. However, they sign up just to follow me and talk to me, which is awesome!"

When asked about her international fans of her cosplay, here's what she had to say:
"There are some people who don't use Twitter. However, they sign up just to follow me and talk to me, which is awesome! That makes me very happy. I am also very happy when I actually get the opportunity to meet them in person, chat with them, and take pictures together during meet and greet events. Thank you very much for always rooting/supporting me. Please continue to see me in your favour."

Pics: Touken Ranbu fanart by PenguinFrontier

One of the highlights of the event was Penguin Frontier's (PF) panel talk, where the 3 main hosts sat him on a chair on the stage, almost interrogation style, minus the table and extra chairs for themselves as they chose to flank him on both sides. Questions came courtesy of fans online as well as in the room, with the hosts adding in their own special mix of naughty eyebrow-raising queries here and there. However, it turned out to be a more casual interview session as the 3 hosts are known to conduct fun sessions, and combined with PF's timid demeanour, things got pretty interesting:

What made you interested in drawing yaoi? Did you go to art school to learn it or was it all self-taught?
PF: It's all self-taught as I didn't attend art school. I think I was about 16 years old when I started drawing yaoi.
How long ago was that?
PF: 8 years ago.
Oooh, now we know your age!
PF: Yeah, I'm 24 now.
Who or what's your inspiration to draw?
PF: Most of them are inspired by artists or pictures that I found online. Another thing is BL anime. My favourite is Sekaiichi Hatsukoi. So when I watch it, I'll be imagining things. You know, like some people will imagine things even with non-yaoi anime such as sports anime, they will think about that guy should do this and that with another guy. I guess it's our job as an artist to visualise them.

Have you ever studied anatomy? Where did you get such an understanding of what a SEXY BODY looks like? Have you ever used a real person for reference?
PF: I don't really use actual people, but I do use photos for reference. I have photos in many folders in my computer. I also heard of artists who are afraid to use references, but I think it's better to use a reference if you can't really draw something because it's not all just by memory. Oh yes, it's also good if you can use a mirror for that sort of thing.
Wow, a mirror?
PF: Yeah, I have a big mirror just beside me while I'm drawing. So whenever I don't know how to draw a pose or something, I'll just look in the mirror.

PenguinFrontier's Panel Talk

Do you feel shy or embarrassed when you draw guys in lewd poses?
PF: Actually, I feel… EXCITED~~~
Audience: *WOOOT!*
Host falls to her knees
PF: *Laughs* If I'm shy, then I won't even be selling my stuff or even posting my stuff online, right? If you like yaoi, that's what keeps you drawing, right?

What's the most difficult yaoi pose you've ever drawn?
PF: I don't like the doggy position for sure. At times, when I read some yaoi manga, there are some characters that twist their bodies so much that I start to think "Are you having sex or doing acrobatics?"

What was your first BL manga?
PF: The first BL manga I read was Gakuen Heaven. But I first got to know about BL through an anime, Ouran High School Host Club.
Audience: Kaoru and Hikaru!?
PF: Yes.
Oooh…twincest!

Are any of the characters/plots/incidents/actions based off your experiences in real life?
PF: Well, my digital manga Faker's Affair has a character called Ryuji. He's based on an ex-classmate of mine during college, whom I disliked. The assignments that I spent a few days to do, working non-stop on just to get an A, he can do in one day! He's tall, handsome, and all that, I was so jealous of him. I was like "Who is this guy!?" and I think that he has to have a bad personality, otherwise it's not fair! That's why I made Ryuji into such a bitch.

What kind of character is your favourite?
PF: The stupid (baka) type. Anyway, it could be anyone that's handsome, then it's fine. But most yaois have handsome characters.

Are you planning on releasing Faker's Affair in hard copy? If yes, will it be an uncensored version?
PF: Sorry, I guess that's not possible because that requires a lot of money and I have to print a lot of copies (in bulk). Also, it may be risky when it comes to shipping internationally due to the content.
So everyone, this is the main reason why you must buy PF's art, so that he can print the hard copies!
Will you be planning to draw any doujins or manga in the future?
PF: Yes, I am planning to release a new manga this year, so I hope you guys will support me.

If you had to choose, what's your favourite work or the one you're most proud of?
PF: It has to be Faker's Affair because it's about a hundred pages of paintings, and I can't believe I actually did that. It was pretty tiring.

What hobbies do you have other than drawing?
PF: I like to play games during my free time. For example, I've been playing a lot of Touken Ranbu lately. It's also an excuse for me to slack off when I'm tired of drawing.

Do you get weird stares from the printing shop people for printing explicit stuff?
PF: Good question! I don't look at them! The first time it happened, I went to this print shop where the person who attended to me was a guy. I handed him my pendrive and acted calmly saying "I want to print this and that" and then I took out my phone and pretended to call someone. Then when it was done, he just handed me the stuff and I just paid him. But if any of you are shy about printing BL stuff (in Malaysia), I suggest that you go to this print shop called Angel at One Academy in Sunway. The boss there knows me and every time, I'll just bring my "pictures" for them to print. They're actually very open about this and they won't give you weird stares. Actually, they stared at the pictures!

What are some of the more memorable reactions you've gotten from fans?
PF: The people that went "Kyaaa!"
Everybody, for a moment, please go "Kyaaa!"
Audience: "KYAAA!"
PF: *Laughs* And there was this one fan who actually couldn't speak when he met me for the first time, so I felt a bit flattered.

Do you ever have fans that try to hit on you when you have in-person events?
PF: Unfortunately, no. I am open to being hit on, please come at me!
Wait! Both girls and boys? Or boys only?
PF: Anyone.
People, take the chance! This is one hot bachelor! Please make him belong to someone!

Which PART of the body do you find the most attractive?
PF: The chest.
Okay everyone! Start working out your chests! Is there a second favourite?
PF: Oh, arms.
So that's why we can see the characters' abs and arms in the Haikyuu artbook. Any other parts?
PF: Umm, no. *laughs*

What was your first love like?
PF: My first love was when I was 16. It was with a guy and only lasted for one week. He was actually a classmate of mine and at that time, I didn't realise that I liked him but I just wanted to get close to him. So for 1 or 2 years, he sat beside me but for some reason, he never liked me at all. But he was always looking over at me in a way that made me think "Do you hate me so much? Did I do anything to you?"
Aww, my heart. Maybe he's a tsundere guy.
Audience: What happened to him?
PF: I am no longer in contact with him.
Audience: AWWW….

I've got a personal question to ask. Are you a top or a bottom?
PF: *Laughs* Can I not answer this because this is basically like asking me... "Do you wanna be fucked or do you want to fuck?"
Audience: *SCREAMS*
Host drops down onto her knees and bows
PF: This is basically asking me about sex positions too. *Laughs*

One of your overseas fans asked: If you were to be a critic of yourself, what's the one thing you'd like to work on and improve, if anything?
PF: Anatomy, and especially the hands. I think many artists know how hard it is to draw hands.

So, we still have a bit of time, we are opening question to the floor if anyone wants to ask him anything.

Audience: Do you prefer to colour straight away for your artwork or do you go greyscale first?
PF: I usually colour straight, but recently, I tried greyscale but am not very good at it. So I just colour straight away.

Audience: Do your parents know what you're drawing?
PF: No, they don't know what I'm drawing. So they don't know that the money that I give them comes from yaoi. The funny thing was that when I printed

my Haikyuu book last year, my mom was like "Hey, why didn't you show me? Print a book and keep it for me, I want to see." I didn't know how to answer that so I was thinking if I should just make a fake book.

So how did you hide it from your parents?
PF: I don't live with my parents, so they don't know. But when I do go back to my hometown or parents' house, and I need to work there, one of my hands actually has to be ready to turn off the monitor. You know, like sometimes, when you're painting using Photoshop, you can't use the Escape button and if you can't shut it down in time, then you're screwed!! So the best way is just to turn off the monitor.

Audience: Do you play BL games and what's your favourite?
PF: My favourite is Sweet Pool. The story is so sad. For that game, I didn't use any cheats, I just used my true feelings. The other game that I like is Dramatical Murder. I got Kojaku's best ending in one shot so I was kinda happy about it.
I feel like the reason is because a true man understands another man.
PF: I mean, when you get it without another guy, it's like I'm the one who truly knows him. And my first game was actually Kichiku Megane. I was so into it that I got all the endings. But at that time, I was too young and felt the content was too strong for me.

Audience: Since you like Kichiku Megane, do you listen to the drama CDs? And who's your favourite seme and uke in Sekaiichi Hatsukoi? And why?
PF: Nope, sorry I haven't listened to it.
Audience: You should!!
PF: Also, I forgot his name but my favourite pairing is Tori and the mangaka.
Audience: Chiaki!
PF: Ah yes, Chiaki. He's so insensitive, so poor Tori, I really pity him.

The session ran for approximately 30 minutes, and everyone seemed to enjoy it as they broke into laughter so many times that they even brought the emcees down onto their knees in fits but most importantly, it was great to see PF come out of his comfort zone and share more about himself with us all.

Overall, I'd say that the event was pretty fun with everyone being open to new things and making new friends. The event hall was too warm though, maybe due to a broken air-cond, but still, it couldn't keep people's energy-levels down.

DID YOU KNOW?

- While Naito's only the co-organizer of the event, she sacrificed and spent a lot of her time, effort, and even money for this event, just to make us fujodanshi happy.
- PenguinFrontier doesn't like to eat bean sprouts.
- This year's event saw an increase in male visitors compared to the previous years.

Everyone giving some love for the "Dakimakura", the grand lucky draw prize.

♥♥(♥_♥)♥♥
T-shirts by Moeco Designs

Event hosts/emcees Serena and Naito, getting the crowd excited.

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
by Aoi Aki

Reviewed by stormwolf2010

Iwai Arata is recommended by his professor to work as a research assistant for mycologist, Murota. At first Murota seemed quite unfriendly, but the longer Iwai works with him, the more he opens up and introduces Iwai to a whole new world.

This is Aoi-sensei's first manga, and I've never seen another one quite like it!

The character designs are fairly plain, but their faces are quite expressive. The simplicity of the designs actually add to the stories for me; they don't distract you from the story at all, and just fit perfectly with the overall feel of the manga.

What makes this stand out is the amount of detail that Aoi-sensei puts into her backgrounds. They are amazing! Some of the pages are completely covered from edge to edge, and the pictures of the plants are beautifully detailed. They wouldn't look out of place in one of those old botany books where the plant diagrams are all hand-drawn.

The main story only goes on for four chapters, but the other one-shot stories are just as lovely. One is about a boy who can see fish that seem to be linked to people's spirits, and the other is about a man who meets a kitsune at his deceased grandfather's house in the mountains.

The stories are all shounen-ai rather than yaoi, but I think they're better this way. Sex scenes would just spoil their beauty.

Most of Aoi-sensei's mangas have the same sort of dream-like quality as this one, so if you like this, I definitely recommend that you check out her other works.

Iwai Arata - When he's recommended as a research assistant for Professor Murota, he initially doesn't know what to expect. However, Murota shows him an amazing world that he never knew existed, and he gradually becomes fascinated by it, and by Murota as well.

Professor Murota - A somewhat eccentric man, he can become so absorbed in his work that he forgets to eat and sleep. His previous assistants never lasted for very long, as they said there was too much work for them to handle.

As a hardcore BL fan, I always anticipate those steamy, intense bed scenes in every manga I read. It's natural really, since it's one of the reasons why a fujoshi's world goes round and round 365 days a year. But once in a while, it isn't so bad to read some fluffy romantic stories full of rainbows and magic like what I experienced with Ishikawa Kei's Colorful Line.

The story was simple. But it felt so real! Just imagine yourself falling for a friend but you can't proactively say it because of your friendship and worse, gender. The main character, Kuzumi Shousuke, was for me, realistic: being depressed with all of those questions he had to himself, going round in circles, running away, fearing love and the elements attached to it. We all experience them when we fall in love for the first time. I even cried during the scene where he compared himself with the girls that Tomoki had dated.

There weren't very many characters involved in the story but I thought that it was better that way. And it was really rare for me to like a female character in a BL story.

Ishikawa-sensei has always been one of my favorite BL mangakas. The blend of drama and humor in this story was balanced; you wouldn't even notice the psychological stuff as everyone kept whacking their heads hard. It has the humor factor, but at the same time, a tear would definitely betray you once you got to the heavy parts. The art was amazing – simple, clean. Definitely no explicit scenes anywhere – just sweet kisses – but you really wouldn't mind.

It's worth reading, especially when you want to refresh your mind from super gorgeous naked men and their steamy plots. This story simply reminds us how wonderful it is to love, and to be loved in return.

Colorful Line
by Ishikawa Kei

Reviewed by Yuuri Kirito

FANS' SPOT-LIGHT

caXiahtic
19, F, Canada

How did you get involved with yaoi/BL? I got involved in the Yaoi world back in 2005, when I first read a magazine that featured Sukisho, which was my first-ever shounen-ai anime.

What's your favourite yaoi/BL title? For anime, it would of course be Sukisho, for it was my first yaoi/BL anime. As for manga, Brother x Brother is my ultimate favourite, and for game, I really LOVE Dramatical Murder, I mean...who doesn't???

How do you like your yaoi/BL? I'm not really very picky, but if I were to choose, I'd go with light BL over hardcore yaoi. And in fact, I'm a very picky person when it comes to the art style, especially with the sex scenes. I prefer it...more detailed, and of course, besides the art, I like stories with a good plot.

Does anyone in real-life know about you liking yaoi/BL? Yes. My sister is one of them as she's a fujoshi herself, along with my best friend, which I'm happy about because I don't really have a hard time finding people to talk to about these kinds of things.

Complete this sentence: "Yaoi gives me …" ...the inspiration to be able to do what I like most, which is liking yaoi and not being embarrassed about it. It's what helps me get through several obstacles in life, believe it or not. Knowing about yaoi has helped me a lot with my relationships, and it's even helped me create relationships with people all over the world who share the same interests as I do, and for that I'm grateful to this world and thankful that I'm a part of the yaoi community that has helped me through these tough times.

How did you get involved with yaoi/BL? I was on Youtube browsing anime videos in 2010 and Junjou Romantica was suggested for me and from watching that all night, I fell into the black hole of OVA's and more!

What is your favourite yaoi/BL title? Warui Koto Shitai.

How do you like your yaoi/BL? I tend to gravitate towards attractive art at first glance but while reading, I look for charming and engaging relationship development and plot. I can read anything but lust is always more enticing!

Does anyone in real-life know about you liking yaoi/BL?
I have two friends who know that I like it but we don't talk about it.

Complete this sentence: "Yaoi gives me … " ...too many emotions to even describe!

Yrasel
17, F, USA

How did you get involved with yaoi/BL? It sort of came naturally to me. Since I was a kid, I was interested in knowing more about gay relationships. My first ship was from DBZ and it grew from there. Now my favourite ships are from Kingdom Hearts and Free!

What's your favourite yaoi/BL title? Koisuru Boukun for sure. I love the storyline and the characters. I feel a connection with Morinaga and his feelings for Souichi in relation to my own experiences.

How do you like your yaoi/BL? Hardcore! I love really well-drawn sex scenes/characters. I also enjoy a good storyline. I'm a sucker for ones that make me feel what the character is feeling. School settings are my favourite. I'll buy any yaoi manga that I know I enjoyed reading online (when available in English).

Does anyone in real-life know about you liking yaoi/BL? Yes, my boyfriend knows and I also have some real-life friends who are also into yaoi. My mom probably wouldn't be shocked if she knew lol.

Complete this sentence: "Yaoi gives me … " ...tranquillity. It gives me time to relax when I'm stressed or depressed. Usually, when I come home from work, I'll sit down for a couple of hours and just read yaoi mangas/doujinshi to clear my mind.

Twinstar
30, F, Canada

serusenpai
22, M, USA

How did you get involved with yaoi/BL? Unfortunately, no one showed me. Years ago, I was reading a shoujo manga, Kare Kano, and stumbled upon this manga by accident. The BL (I forgot the title) was about a butler and his master. Luckily, there were no sexy scenes in it since I was only 13 years old. I've been into yaoi since then.

What's your favourite yaoi/BL title? My favourite yaoi manga/anime right now is Love Stage. I never get tired of re-reading and re-watching it. It has the right amount of romance and comedy and makes the fangirl inside me squeal and tingle.

How do you like your yaoi/BL? I prefer a mix of light BL and mild-core yaoi. I actually like my BL to have some sort of plot instead of pure or mostly smut. I get really interested if the BL has a nice and sweet storyline, great art style, and a bit of comedy. Lastly, I avoid sad, dark, or weird fetishes in BL/yaoi.

Does anyone in real-life know about you liking yaoi/BL? Yes, I usually find fellow BL/yaoi lovers online and in real-life, and we discuss and recommend yaoi titles to each other.

Complete this sentence: "Yaoi gives me … " ...a source of life and the energy to survive the everyday struggle of an ultimate-mega-ultra fudanshi king of the universe.

SPECIAL

"Kyaa! It's Shimazaki Nobunaga!"

Written by Aino Winifred
Edited by Nikki

My Nobu's collection! ♥

Shimazaki Nobunaga (Nobu) is most well-known for voicing the character Nanase Haruka from the popular anime TV series Free! He has voiced a lot of other characters who share certain similarities such as their deep voices and reticence characteristics, for example, Furuya Satoru (Daiya no Ace), Tatsumi (Orenchi no Furo Jijou) etc. As he likes to mix it up once in a while, he has also voiced some bright and cheerful characters such as Sakurai Ryo (Kuroko no Basket), Shidou Itsuka (Date-A Live) etc.

Back when Free! started becoming popular in 2013, I wasn't really into him yet and it was only because of his name, Shimazaki Nobunaga, (his given name Nobunaga is the same as the famous samurai Oda Nobunaga of Japan's Warring States period) that made me start to pay attention to him. As I'm really into Japanese seiyuus, I always read the monthly Japanese seiyuu magazines. At that time, his interviews and photos were published with increasing regularity due to the popularity of the Free! anime, and I slowly became attracted to him. He has many appealing characteristics, some of which are cheerful, polite, humble, talkative, and easy-going, which is very different from my first impression of his character Nanase Haruka from Free! On top of that, his iconic dazzling smile is definitely strong enough to blind me.

Besides anime roles, he's also voiced characters in several BL drama CDs. My favourite is his Boku wa Subete wo Shitteiru & Hanafurirou series, as his voice is extremely cute and innocent, making me fall for him even more! I hope he'll have more drama CD opportunities in the future!

On the 9th of February 2014, there was a Free! event held at the Taipei International Book Exhibition 2014 in Taiwan with appearances by Shimazaki Nobunaga (Nanase Haruka) and Yonaga Tsubasa (Hazuki Nagisa). Somehow, I was one of the lucky ones who managed to get hold of a "signing ticket" out of a total of 200 people. It was a very worrying time as there was a heavy snowstorm in Japan and several flights were cancelled or delayed. Both of the seiyuus were scheduled to arrive the day before the event but due to the snowstorm, their flight was delayed until the next day, which was the day of the event itself. The event was supposed to have started at 12pm but was delayed till 3pm. As a holder of the "signing ticket", I was able to stand in front of the stage according to my queue number. The host of the event kept on entertaining the fans while we waited for the duo to appear. Suddenly, I heard screaming from the back of the hall. I turned around and saw as Nobu and Yonaga Tsubasa walked in! As I was seated quite a ways from the stage, they were about an arm's length away from me. They walked through the small path beside the fans area and to the backstage. The host said they'd just landed and came straight from the airport. Thank goodness they made it!

The event was shortened due to insufficient time as they were scheduled to return to Japan straight after the event. The fans game segment sadly had to be cancelled and after the stage greeting, a short interview, group photos, and a live drama, the last segment, the signing event, began. Only ticket holders were allowed into a special room and therefore, I had the chance to see them up close! The autographs were pre-signed. On the spot, Yonaga Tsubasa wrote my name and Nobu wrote the date. Fans were able to have a short conversation with them while waiting for the autographs.

After exchanging greetings, Nobu handed over my autograph and said that he was sorry that the event was delayed until so late etc. How nice of him! I told him that I'd come all the way from Malaysia and gave him my present. I stuck a Petronas Twin Towers postcard on my paper bag. I still remember vividly how shocked he was when he saw it. He said thank you and smiled! I had a lot to say but upon seeing him face-to-face, I panicked and couldn't get my words out! I mentioned that I'll continue to support him and that I was looking forward to Season 2 of Free! We shook hands and waved goodbye~ OMG! I was so happy!! ♥ It was such an indescribable feeling being able to meet someone I've admired for so long! That was my first time seeing him in person and he's such a cutie-pie! He looks exactly the same in the magazines, bright and cheerful. Since then, my passion towards him has never ceased.

Later that year, on the 22nd of June 2014, there was a talk and handshake event in conjunction with the release of his drama CD "Eikaiwa kyoushi Maezono-kun to Ushiroda-kun!!" held at Animate Ikebukuro's event hall in Japan. Upon purchasing the drama CD, I was given a ticket for the event which was given out on a first-come first-served basis. There was a short talk about the drama CD, and a scissor-paper-stone contest amongst fans where the winner received an autographed English learning book. They even had a verbal translation from Japanese to English test (this segment was the funniest!). Nobu tried very hard to figure out the proper words to the question but failed terribly! I noticed that he can understand English but just couldn't pick the right words. The handshake session started right after that and after greeting him like last time, I told him where I was from and that I left him a present and letter to look at. His expression was that of surprise upon hearing that I'm from Malaysia. He then replied "Thank you" in English and waved goodbye. The handshake was really short, just about 5 seconds, before the staff pushed me to leave. I wish I could have spoken to him more! The event lasted about an hour and 30 minutes. That night, he tweeted "Thank you to those who'd attended today's event, there were even some fans from overseas too! Really, thank you for that!" I'm not sure whether he was referring to me. That concluded my second time meeting him in person.

And just a few months ago, on the 23nd of September 2015, an autographed drama CD jacket handover event was held in Akihabara, Japan. The drama CD was for "Akogare no Omiseya-san". This drama CD featured Nobu on his own, with the listener (yourself) as the heroine! The story's about his character named Kusaka Taiga, who works in a convenience store and who one day meets the heroine and falls in love with her at first sight. This event was limited to 200 people and in order to participate, you had to purchase the drama CD which came with an event application postcard enclosed, fill in your details, and post it back before the 15th of September! Winners were selected through the balloting process, a very common selection method in Japan and would be notified through a postcard on the 18th of September. After I found out via Twitter that most of the fans had received their postcards, I immediately checked with my friend who helped me send out my postcards. She said that she hadn't received a winning postcard about the event… I was so depressed at that time and nearly cried, that was the

day before I departed for Japan! I also left my fan letter halfway… my friend told me to just wait a while, that maybe there was a delay. My flight was in the morning so I thought that if I really didn't win it, that I should at least finish the letter and hand it over to another friend who'd won the ballot to place it in the present box for him. I managed to complete my letter during my 7 hours flight and after landing at Narita Airport, immediately connected to the Wi-Fi and received a message from my friend saying that I'd won it! I thought to myself that I'd get to talk to him again and give him the letter myself! *CRIES*

When I reached the venue on the day of the event, I started to feel anxious! All the winners were required to verify their identities and go through a security check before entering the venue. I was given seat number 22, which was just 3 rows away from the stage. Once I sat down and looked at the stage, my hands started shivering. I was so nervous! The venue played the drama CD and when the time came, the host greeted us and introduced Nobu to the stage! At first sight, he looked so handsome! His ensemble of the day was all in black. Black shirt, black pants, and black boots with a red scarf! The first thing he did was to greet us fans who participated and purchased the drama CD for this very chance of meeting him in person, which wasn't cheap. There was a very short talk before the handover event started.

This time fans got the chance to talk a bit longer than at the previous handshake event. When my turn came, I greeted him then asked, "I'm from Malaysia and was at the Free! Taiwan event and handshake event before, do you remember me?" He looked at me with his eyes wide open and replied, "Seems like I have seen you before..." I was so happy! I then asked him another question, "Last year for your birthday, I sent you a letter from Malaysia, did you receive it?" Before I could finish my whole sentence, he immediately replied, "Yes yes! The packaging was kind of special and I received it" (I think he was referring to the envelope with the Malaysian stamps on it). The moment he said this, I was so happy! I had lots to say but at that moment, I could only say "Thank you!"

Nobu smiling at me! ♥

After a few precious minutes, one of the staff members gave me a pat on my shoulder, reminding me that my time was almost up. Nobu kept on staring at me while holding my hand, making me feel even more nervous than before! I told myself that this time, I had to talk to him as much as possible! So I continued and ended up saying "I can't always go to your events in Japan but I will continue to support you from Malaysia!" He replied, "Thank you very much", smiled his dazzling smile and ended our conversation. That was my third time talking to him in person. It was short, but it has become an unforgettable memory in my life! I really hope that I'll get more chances to meet and talk to him in the future!

Nobunaga-san DAISUKI!

♥♡♡♡♥

If you're a Nobu fan and wish to contact the writer, Aino, you can reach her at the following sites:

https://www.facebook.com/aino.winifred or https://twitter.com/aino_winifred

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BL DAY TRIP IN JAPAN

The AarinFantasy team flew to Japan for a week in the summer/autumn of September 2015. We decided to spend a day dedicated to all things BL!

Written by Aarin, with sef & Erisa
Edited by: Nikki

Early that morning (10am), we headed to the Animate Café, a themed café opened by the Japanese chain store for anything and everything manga, animation, and game-related. For those who aren't familiar with the way the Animate Café works, the theme changes every month depending on the anime or game in season. Other than food and drink offerings designed specifically to suit the theme, the café also sells exclusive merchandise. We were fortunate that the café, situated inside ORE Building (Animate Café Ikebukuro's 2nd Branch), was having a Junjou Romantica (JR) & Emerald collaboration in conjunction with the airing of JR from the 1st till the 29th of September 2015. Occasionally, due to the popularity of the anime-of-the-month, the café imposes some seating rules that require guests to be registered and subjected to balloting to secure a seat on their desired day. It's best to check their website for such details if you intend on visiting the café to avoid any disappointments.

Back to our weekday café visit, there was already a queue when we arrived at 10.30am. That month, seating was given out on a first-come first-served basis on weekdays, while a reservation was required during the weekends. Upon arrival, we were immediately allocated a table, given a number, and were instructed to return at 11.00am when the café opens. At the stated time, we were shown to our seats and were given a short introduction by the café's

Top: *The cozy interior of JR & Emerald theme cafe.*
Middle: *Bookmarks given upon purchase of any meal.*
Bottom: *Beautiful wall displays of artwork & manga in the cafe.*

Upon purchasing any drink, you get a coaster! And yes, that's a dog shaped cookie inside the drink.

host. Each session is limited to 2 hours. All the seats in the café were taken, with 95% made up of female patrons and only around 2 or 3 men amongst us.

The food and drinks served were nice, especially the café latte which was velvety with a smooth coffee taste topped off with a cute latte artwork of Suzuki-san (Japanese milk seems to have a really amazing and creamy taste to it!). The hamburger set was pretty good too – a delicious beef patty topped with a decadent mushroom sauce, green salad, and a bun with Suzuki-san's image toasted on it. A drink purchase entitled you to a random coaster while a meal purchase got you a random JR bookmark. In a bid to get a coaster of her favourite character, one of my team members ordered a café latte even though she doesn't drink coffee. Well, more creamy latte for me~ (^,^)

Atmosphere-wise, the café was full of original artwork by some of Emerald's mangakas such as Nakamura Shungiku (JR and Sekaiichi Hatsukoi) and Abe Miyuki (Super Lover and Hakkenden), while music and songs from the JR anime melodiously played in the background. There was also a corner where people could purchase the exclusive merchandise available only to patrons, such as manga, glassware, file folders, badges etc. You could also try your luck at getting your favourite character from the Gachapon Machine. Halfway through our meal, the host conducted a simple game of rock, paper, scissors between the other hosts. Every customers had the chance to win some autographed JR posters, but unfortunately we didn't win any. **Price PER PERSON for food and a drink: About 1500 yen**

After our brunch, we took the train (2pm) to Libre Publishing's office for a special invitation-only visit. The office is strictly not open to the public so this was a real treat for us. The office occupies three floors of a building humbly tucked into a quiet part of town in nearby Shinjuku. We were greeted warmly by the editor/producer, who introduced us to three key people in the company who also speak English. We were given a mini tour of the office (sorry, no pictures allowed) and it totally reminded us of the editor's office in the Sekai-ichi Hatsukoi anime. Papers and books were neatly stacked up all over the place, as were posters of the latest Libre releases. We were greeted by the huge Fei Long and Asami promotional posters for the recently released Viewfinder 2 OVA upon entering the office. Also not forgetting THAT life-sized standee board of Asami (ViewFinder) right in front of Libre's entrance! (You should have heard a team member's squeals of joy at the sight of it, you could probably hear it all the way from another country!)

We then sat down inside one of their meeting rooms and exchanged some important bits of information and knowledge that we wanted to highlight. Some of the points we discussed over the 2 great hours are as follows:

- AarinFantasy (AF) forum and its members; the demographics of visitors outside of Japan who like yaoi. Also, we conveyed some feedback that we'd picked up over the years from forum members.
- To reach out to more international fans by offering more English-translated works, and making online purchases easier with more purchasing options.
- Law limitations in certain countries due to yaoi content issues.
- Digital versus printed yaoi manga, where digital manga is trending not only internationally but also in Japan as well, even with the easy accessibility and cheaper prices there. I also highlighted that there are quite a lot of fans who like to buy the books for their collection.
- The process of making a manga: We were shown some hand-drawn images, captions, and layout placements.
- More opportunities for mangakas to visit other countries for meet-and-greets.

During "tea-time", we were served some Japanese soft azuki bean jelly and green tea, it was so tasty!

We really learned a lot from this visit, such as the process of producing a BL manga for the magazine and tankoubon (one volume manga), the timeline required, and also the details of a manga editor's job. For example, fans sometimes voice out that the wait for a manga chapter is too long. During this visit, we learned that the Be.Boy Gold magazine is released every 2 months, meaning that 6 chapters of a BL title is released in a year before it's released in tankoubon form. And so, for this title to be translated and released in English, it takes a further year for licensing, translation, and editing (no easy feat!) As we learned about the process, we saw with our own eyes the effort it takes not only for the mangaka but also for the editors and members of the publishing company to produce a single title. It made us even more determined to support and contribute back to the industry.

We found out that Libre knows what AF is all about and they were very understanding, having invited us into their domain, that we felt so grateful for the opportunity. In line with that, they asked us to spread the word of the importance of buying original works and getting people to change their mindset instead of just downloading things for

***Top:** Asami life-sized standee at Libre's entrance! Niceeeeee!*
***Bottom:** Gifts from Libre - Manga and phone book size magazines!*

free. I mentioned that a lot of people would like to buy the originals if they could understand it (translated works) and have more accessibility to it as currently, most yaoi works are only available in Japan or in the Japanese language.

Libre surprised us once again by giving us a few copies of BL magazines and manga. In turn, we gave them the gifts and local delicacies we brought for them from home. In the end, we didn't want to leave as we felt that there was so much more to discuss and learn about but alas, our time was up and we ended our lovely meeting with bows, a few handshakes, and even a few hugs for good measure!

After recovering from our eye-opening visit, we headed back to Ikebukuro again via train (4pm), to visit the famous Otome Street. I was told that it's a must-stop for Fujoshis, so I had to check it out! The street is located on the East side of Ikebukuro Station, so it's advisable to follow the signboards towards Sunshine City from the Ikebukuro train station. On the way, we even managed to check out the Free! themed café, located directly in front of the SEGA store but sadly, it was only open to people with reservations who'd successfully balloted on the café's website. At the SEGA store, I realised that there was a mad queue for something, and obviously, that made me insanely curious to find out more. In the end, we found out that it was for a Yowamushi Pedal collaboration with a Takoyaki (squid ball) outlet there! We got hungry soon after and looked for a random place to eat and stumbled upon an Okonomiyaki (Japanese style egg pancake) restaurant on the 3rd floor, just beside the SEGA store and right above the Matsuya restaurant. We cooked the eggs we mixed with various ingredients on the grill table ourselves, and then topped it off with okonomiyaki sauce, mayonnaise, seaweed powder, and bonito flakes. It was very tasty and filling, which was a good way to recharge our batteries before carrying on with our fun-filled fujoshi day!

We reached the famous Otome Street at 6pm, our first stop was K-Books which offers floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall shelves of yaoi manga!

Top: *Free! themed café*
Bottom: *Mad queue for Yowamushi Pedal Takoyaki!*

Inside K-Books where every book you see here are all BL books and that's only a small part of it!

This is indeed a treasure cove for fans! There's also another K-Books store on the 1st floor of the building on the right, which houses the BL doujinshi section of the shop and has a selection so wide you have to see it to believe it. Doujins here are sorted by fandoms, so we spread out to look for our stuff separately since we like different fandoms. Some of the more popular ones at that time were Touken Ranbu (with doujins occupying almost ¼ of the shop), Yowamushi Pedal, Free! and Kuroko no Basuke. There's also a bookstore called Mandarake just a few meters away from K-Books, located in a somewhat underground space. There, we found lots of pre-loved BL manga and doujins, which meant only one thing, cheaper stuff! However, if you want to support an artist you love, do consider buying a new book instead from bookstores such as Animate and K-Books.

Aarin exploring "K-Books" bookstore ♥
Every fujoshi's dream!

Other than bookstores, Otome Street also has shops selling cosplay items, anime CDs & DVDs, Drama CD (especially BL Titles), anime

merchandise, and even some Seiyuu merchandise. If you ever have the opportunity, do visit this place and I'm sure you'll find something that will interest you. (Warning: A visit to this place will most probably make a hole in your pocket, so do be careful. ^_^)

After getting what we wanted, we realised that we were still too early to adjourn to our reservation at a BL Café. Around the corner of K-Books, we stumbled upon a very small Cat Café called Smokers Club (well, the owner is a smoker) which has 7 adorable cats in residence, happily playing around inside the café. Looking at the cats from outside the shop, we couldn't resist them and ended up going inside. The place only seats around 14 people, so it was pretty tiny but the owner lets her cats roam free. After ordering some drinks, we spent some time there resting and chatting while petting and playing with the cats. The cats here are very friendly and playful, each identifiable by the different colours of their beaded collars. Needless to say, we had a fluffy good time~.

We then continued our walk towards the BL Café – Boy's Love Academy Café *(3 Chome-9-13 Higashiikebukuro, 2F Toshima-ku, Tokyo-to 170-0013)* (8:30pm). Although it was not easy to spot it, we managed to find the small signboard at the entrance leading upstairs to the second floor. As we opened the door, we were greeted by the male hosts there, full of smiles. Obviously, by the café's name, the theme of the café was that of an academy and had a teacher and student concept which offered categories of: 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students and the teachers. The guy that attended to us was the teacher, Ichijo Rui, or "Rui-sensei" as we called him, a cute guy with an amazing smile.

We were seated near the entrance, at a table with drawers full of BL manga. A team member couldn't help but flip through the "illegal goods" after we ordered our food. Sensei asked us for our names and chatted with us while we waited. The BL Café has its fair share of foreign visitors too according to Rui-sensei, who's able to speak some basic English, but since a few of us speak Japanese too, we had no problems understanding him.

We were playing with two cute kitties using a Makoto strap inside a cat cafe.

Inside the BL Academy cafe, just before the Pocky Game starts!
(Only food and menu pics are allowed) @_@

It occurred to us that a lot of single ladies were there just to spend some time, wanting some form of companionship with the boys. The café charges by the hour, with the 1st hour at 1,000 yen plus 1 free drink. Subsequently, each extension of 30 minutes is an extra 500 yen. The menu's pretty simple with pasta and sandwiches, tea and coffee. The food was nothing to shout about, on the pricey side really, but enough to fill our tummies. But of course, that wasn't the real reason we were there. What indeed is a BL Café without a BL Act!? The menu offers 3 BL Acts, which means that you can choose to pay the boys there to act out a BL scene of your choice. We ended up with the one recommended by Rui-sensei, "The Pocky Game". He then asked if we wanted him or his partner, Hinata, to be the seme or uke. Going the conventional way, we told Sensei to be the seme and his partner the uke. After around 10 minutes, they told us to move to another corner, where we were seated directly in front of them. They sat on a sofa and told us to say "Start" when we wanted them to begin. Here's how it went:

Rui (Seme) and Hinata (Uke) are looking through their phones. Rui shows Hinata his phone but when Hinata tries to borrow Rui's phone, Rui doesn't let him (because there's some weird mail inside). Hinata persisted, so Rui tried using a few tactics to distract him. Hinata got angry.

The conversation went like this:
Rui: Come on Hinata. Don't you trust me? I said there's nothing inside. **soft persuasive tone**
Hinata: Why can't I see your phone if there's nothing inside?
Rui: Come on, trust me for a bit. **takes Hinata's hand and puts it on his own shoulders. Undoes Hinata's tie and moves Hinata's hand to his lap, tying his hands with the tie** *(Internal Fangirl Scream!)*
Hinata: What are you doing? Why are you tying me up? **soft angry tone**
Rui: I just want you to trust me. **moves between Hinata's legs, bringing his tied hands on top of Hinata's head, his face moving closer to Hinata's**
Rui: Are you still angry?
Hinata: I'm not... **pouts**
Rui: **takes pocky and puts it in his mouth and goes in… **
Rui and Hinata nibble the Pocky until their lips almost touch... *(We really do think they kissed!!)*
But instead of stopping there, Rui goes in for more and his right hand slides from Hinata's shoulder, goes behind his back to his waist, and slides inside his shirt… *(nosebleed)*

But of course, it had to end there!! *(NOOOO… we screamed)*

We gave them a standing ovation for their very cute and 'no holds barred' performance. Worth it? TOTALLY! Upon paying for the bill, we were each given a school card with our names on it as a certificate for entering the school. **TOTAL spent on the BL Café for 4 people: About 4000 yen.**

After regaining our composure, we realised that it was almost 10pm and proceeded to head back to our hotel. Every second on the way back, we talked about what a fulfilling day it was for us as BL fans. Unfortunately, the day seemed to have ended way too soon but we hope to be able to return to Japan for more awesome BL adventures in the future.

Map: Showing you some of the places we've been for the day.
They are just a short walking distance from Ikebukuro EAST Station.

Quick Tips:

- Visit or stay in Ikebukuro for a more centralised or complete BL experience.
- Find a hotel to stay in Ikebukuro if possible. If you're on a budget, you can opt for the Sakura Hotel, Ikebukuro but I personally recommend looking up places to stay via AirBnB if possible (be sure to check the reviews first!)
- If you decide to go to a themed café in Japan, do make reservations, especially for the weekends.
- Buy a single day train pass if you're hopping on and off trains a lot around Tokyo.

AarinFantasy's Original Characters

(Coming soon to your private folder)

Concept & Storyline by: AarinFantasy | Artwork by: Joberu.deviantart.com

We're planning a manga project with these characters. We may even start a crowd-funding project or a Patreon page so that we can pay for some of the costs involved, and especially the artist fees.If you're interested,
please stay tuned for future announcements at the following links:
Forum: aarinfantasy.com
FaceBook: facebook.com/AarinFantasyOfficial
Twitter: twitter.com/aarinfantasy
Instagram: instagram.com/aarinfantasy